

TABLE OF CONTENTS 2015.04.03

Newsweek

FEATURES

THE NEW EXODUS: CHRISTIANS FLEE ISIS IN THE MIDDLE EAST

After years of slow but steady decline, Christians are being driven from the Middle East by ISIS.





FIGHTING TO RECLAIM THE FUTURE OF OAKLAND'S YOUNG BLACK MEN

DOWNLOADS



WHO REALLY KILLED
BORIS NEMTSOV?



TALIBAN LEADERS ARE LIVING IN LUXURY IN QATAR



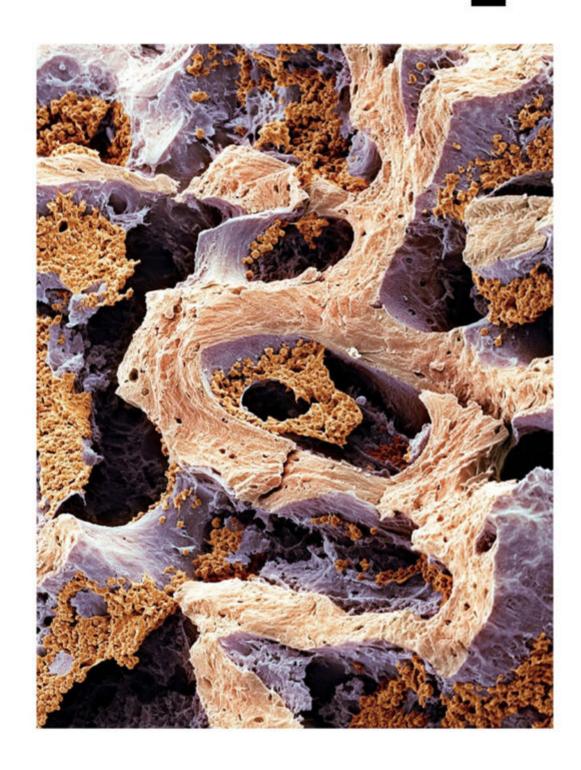
EXONERATIONS
ARE ON THE
RISE, THANKS TO
DEDICATED JUSTICE
UNITS



Newsweek

MANIPULATING
WIKIPEDIA TO
PROMOTE A BOGUS
BUSINESS SCHOOL

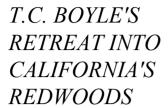
NEW WORLD



3-D SILK
STRUCTURE
ENABLES
SCIENTISTS
TO GROW
BLOOD CELLS
OUTSIDE THE
BODY

DOWNTIME







AFTER ROBIN
WILLIAMS'S
SUICIDE, BRIAN
COPELAND
REVIVES HIS
SHOW ABOUT
DEPRESSION



YOU'RE 100% WRONG ABOUT: PRIVACY

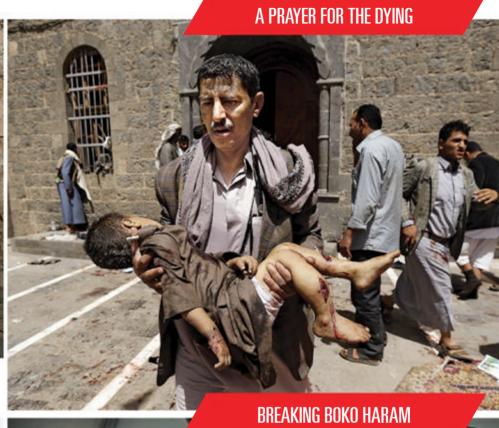


MACHINE GUN AMERICA IS EXACTLY WHAT IT SOUNDS LIKE

TABLE OF CONTENTS 2015.04.03

BIG SHOTS









COVER 2015.04.03



Ed Kashi/VII

THE NEW EXODUS: CHRISTIANS FLEE ISIS IN THE MIDDLE EAST

AFTER YEARS OF SLOW BUT STEADY DECLINE, CHRISTIANS ARE BEING DRIVEN FROM THE MIDDLE EAST BY ISIS.

Before jihadists overran this mountain town in 2013, Maaloula was one of the oldest Christian communities in Syria, where Western Aramaic—the language of Jesus Christ—is still spoken. It was also a place of profound peace, where Sunni and Shiite Muslim residents, along with their Christian neighbors, forged a pact early in the war to avoid the sectarian conflict ripping their country apart. "We decided that even if the mountains around us were exploding with fighting, we would not go to war," Mahmoud Diab, a Sunni imam, told Newsweek in 2012. "It's a sectarian war, but the fact is, there is no war here in Maaloula. In this town, we are not defined by religion. We all know each other. Everyone is a Christian, and everyone is Muslim."

Tolerance had been a tradition in Maaloula since St. Takla—the daughter of a pagan prince and an early disciple (and possibly wife) of St. Paul—fled to these mountains in the first century. She was escaping soldiers sent by her father, who was threatening to kill her for her ardent faith in her adopted religion. St. Takla was exhausted and, finding her way blocked by the sharp, rocky sides of a mountain, fell on her knees in desperate prayer. Legend has it the mountains parted, and she escaped. Maaloula means entrance in Aramaic. For centuries, Christians and Muslims have come here to pray for miracles, but the residents of Maaloula weren't blind to the dangers that swirled around them when I visited on several occasions in 2012 and 2013. "I am afraid of the kind of people who will come here," said Antoinette Nasrallah, a Syrian-American, originally from Miami, who owned a café in the center of town. "I am afraid of Salafists."

Still, an ancient way of life prevailed in the convents and monasteries of Maaloula, set amid apricot trees that attracted songbirds.

The idyll was shattered on September 4, 2013, when a Jordanian suicide bomber exploded a truck at a Syrian army checkpoint at the entrance of the town. Eight soldiers were killed. Rebel opposition soldiers and jihadists fighting against Syrian President Bashar Assad attacked, and the battle of Maaloula, a UNESCO-protected town, had begun. The Syrian army led a counterattack two days later, regaining control, but the fighting continued. The rebels

again took the town and this time burned down churches and began to drive out Christian residents.

At that point, nearly the entire population of Maaloula fled. Some went to Beirut, an unfortunate reminder of the gruesome slogan chanted by opposition members at rallies from the beginning of the conflict: "Christians to Beirut, Alawites to the coffin."

The Syrian government eventually took back Maaloula, but in November 2013 more opposition forces—including the jihadist Jabhat al-Nusra (the Al-Qaeda franchise in Syria)—attacked. They kidnapped 12 nuns from the monastery to exchange for their captured fighters.



A soldier loyal to Syria's president Bashar Al-Assad stand beside a damaged church in Maaloula, Syria, August 21, 2014. Credit: Omar Sanadiki/Reuters

For nearly six months, the ancient town was again under siege until April 14, 2014, when the Syrian army—with the help of Iranian-backed Hezbollah militia—once more took control of Maaloula.

Recalling the assault by jihadists, 62-year-old Adnan Nasrallah told the Arabic daily newspaper Al Akbar: "I saw people wearing al-Nusra headbands who started shooting at crosses," adding that one of them "put a pistol to the head of my neighbor and forced him to convert to Islam by obliging him to repeat, 'There is no God but God.'

"Afterwards they joked, 'He's one of ours now.""

The Syrian army still controls most of Maaloula, but only around 150 Christian families have returned. Many houses have been gutted by fires, and the churches and monasteries are damaged from the fighting.

As the season of Lent and abstinence leading up to Easter began in Maaloula in February, the faithful few gathered to pray. But they are no longer praying for cures for ailments or for a profitable harvest from their fields. Now they are praying for survival, because they know hundreds of their fellow Christians have been kidnapped and murdered by ISIS.

Despite this, they refuse to flee, because Syria is their country, their home. Mahmoud Diab, the imam, has left the town, but Antoinette Nasrallah is still in Maaloula. When I spoke to her by telephone a few weeks before Easter, she said the reason was simple: "It has to do with history."

IN THE NAME OF GOD

Christians are only one of the many religious groups in Iraq and Syria that have suffered atrocities at the hands of ISIS, other armed groups and the Assad regime. Many more Muslims have been killed or driven from their homes, but ISIS has repeatedly trumpeted its attacks on Christians, whom it often refers to as "crusaders," as part of a holy war it claims to be fighting in the name of Islam.

These latest horrors build on the prejudice, discrimination and oppression that over the past few decades have steadily reduced the proportion of Christians in the Middle East from around 20 percent at the start of the 20th century to around 5 percent now. Less than 1 percent of the

world's more than 2 billion Christians live in the Middle East, and there are fears that number could dwindle even further.

"Some of the oldest Christian communities in the world are disappearing in the very lands where their faith was born and first took root," says the Center for American Progress in a report published in March. After the recent atrocities by ISIS, it says, "Christians have migrated from the region in increasing numbers, which is part of a longer-term exodus related to violence, persecution, and lack of economic opportunities stretching back decades."



An Orthodox Christian family enjoys an abundance of food for their Easter lunch in the Jaramana district of southern Damascus, Syria on April 19, 2009. Credit: Ed Kashi/VII

Solid numbers on population shifts in Iraq and Syria and on Christian casualties are hard to get because of the chaos in the region. Millions of people of various religions have fled, including nearly 4 million Syrian refugees now living in Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Turkey and Iraq. Another 6.5 million Syrians are internally displaced—meaning half of the country's pre-war population of around 20 million has been forced from their homes. A European Parliament

resolution in March condemning attacks on Christians and other minorities said more than 700,000 Syrian Christians were among those who have fled the country. Before 2011, the Christian population there was estimated to be around 1.1 million.

In Iraq, this latest round of Christian persecution started with the U.S.-led invasion in 2003 and the sectarian violence that followed. The pre-2003 Christian population may have been as high as 1.4 million. Now estimates put it between 260,000 and 350,000. Many Iraqi Christians moved to safer regions in the north under Kurdish control, but now ISIS is threatening them there too.

Reports of atrocities against Christians, as well as the ransacking of shrines such as the tomb of Jonah in Mosul last July, have sparked dire predictions from the likes of Britain's Prince Charles, who said in February he feared there would be "very, very few" Christians left in the Middle East, according to The New York Times. A few Westerners have even joined Christian militias to defend their faith.

The plight of Christians in the Middle East varies greatly from country to country, but the news is mostly bad. In Lebanon, for example, Christians make up around 38 percent of the population and play a powerful role in politics (though many fled during the 1975-1990 civil war). In Jordan, there are not many Christians, but they are guaranteed some seats in Parliament and generally live in safety, and the country has become a relatively safe haven for Christian refugees. In Israel and the Palestinian territories, the small Christian populations are generally not targeted for violence, but they endure the same hardships as their neighbors who are also caught in the never-ending Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

COVER 2015.04.03



Coptic Christians attend Orthodox Christmas Eve Mass in the Cave Cathedral or St. Sama'ans Church on the Mokattam hills overlooking Cairo, Egypt, January 6, 2015. Credit: Mosa'ab Elshamy/AP

Egypt has the most Christians in the Middle East—at least 4 million, mostly Coptic, Christians—and they have long complained of institutionalized discrimination. The Copts were targeted by attacks after the 2011 Arab Spring uprising that ousted President Hosni Mubarak and brought the Muslim Brotherhood to power in 2012 elections. Crowds of Islamists attacked Coptic homes, shops and churches, and murders and kidnappings were reported. Nadia Abdelwahab, the widow of a Muslim, was sentenced to 15 years in prison after converting back to Christianity following his death. Such incidents created a climate of fear that drove an estimated 100,000 Coptic Christians to emigrate.

For some Christians, the removal of President Mohamed Morsi from power by Egypt's military in 2013 heralded a new beginning, says the Reverend Rafic Greiche, a Melkite Catholic, and spokesman for the Catholic Church in Egypt. He sees reasons for optimism in the fact that President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi, the military leader who took over in 2014, visited St. Mark's Cathedral in Cairo for the Coptic

Christmas celebrations in January, the first such visit by an Egyptian president.

But Egyptian Christians were jolted again when ISIS released a video in February showing the beheading of 21 Copts who had traveled to Libya for work. The video shows the men dressed in orange and kneeling on a beach before they are beheaded, and a message refers to them as "crusaders," promising: "We will conquer Rome, by Allah's permission"—a clear threat to the Roman Catholic Church.

Al-Sisi responded firmly to the beheadings, declaring a week of mourning and launching airstrikes against ISIS in Libya.

RESIST OR RUN

The Arab Spring was problematic for Christians in the Middle East, and not just because it propelled Islamists to power in places like Egypt. The revolts also exposed the unseemly compromise many Christian groups had made: support dictators in exchange for protection. In Syria, Christians had historically been persecuted, but they were protected under Bashar Assad and his father, Hafez, before him. Partially this is because Assad's Baath regime was founded by Syrian Greek Orthodox Christian Michel Aflaq and emphasizes nationalism above ethnicity or religion. While many Christians took a neutral stance when the peaceful demonstrations against Assad began in March 2011, resentment against them remains. Even before the rise of ISIS, both Alawites and Christians were targeted by Syrian rebel forces.

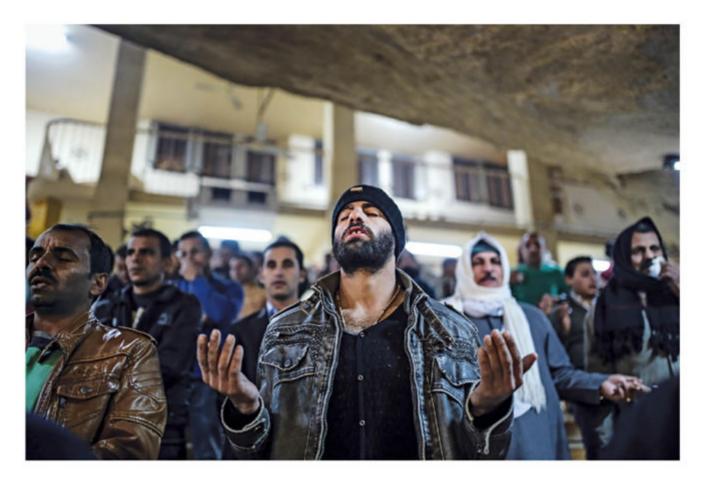
Samer Massouh, a Roman Catholic lawyer who lived in Homs from 2013 until earlier this year while conducting research on Christians for Germany's Friedrich-Ebert Foundation, says Christians are under threat from all sides in Syria—from ISIS, from Assad's regime and from some anti-regime forces. But the main reason Christians flee is the

same as for people of other faiths—the total collapse of the economy and civil society, the lack of electricity, schools and other basics of life. Add to that the persecution by ISIS and many find little reason to stay. "It is not something that came out of the blue," Massouh says. "The Christians in Syria and the wider Middle East, they always live within their countries with the perception that they would be persecuted. ISIS came as a confirmation of that."

In the area around Homs, a strategic position for the opposition because of the supply routes to Lebanon, an estimated 10,000 Christians have either left their homes or been displaced.

Even if you're not on the front line, staying can be a daunting and sometimes heartbreaking challenge. In Damascus one Sunday in March at the Church of Olives in the Old City, a 47-year-old parishioner attending Mass who would only give his first name (George) expresses the sentiments of many Christians, saying, "This is my country, and I don't want to leave." Nonetheless, he has sent his wife and children to Abu Dhabi.

COVER 2015.04.03

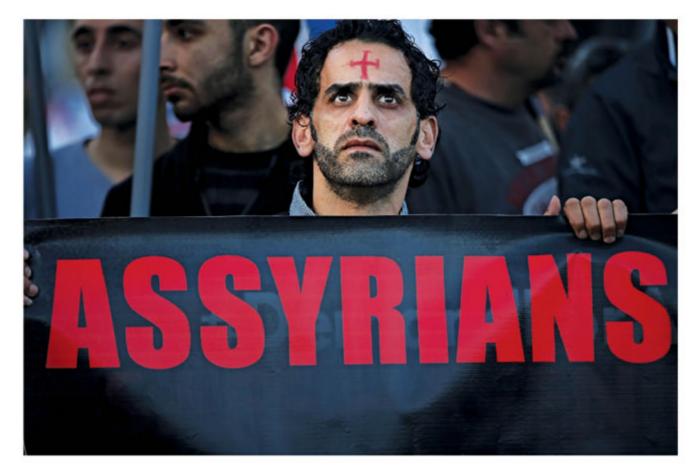


Coptic Christians attend Orthodox Christmas Eve Mass in the Cave Cathedral or St. Sama'ans Church on the Mokattam hills overlooking Cairo, Egypt, January 6, 2015. Credit: Mosa'ab Elshamy/AP

Nicholas Heras, a political analyst who has conducted an extensive study on the Christian population in Syria, believes Christians are vulnerable because the majority of them live in strategic areas of the country—Homs, Aleppo, Damascus and their provinces—where the heavy fighting is taking place. In Aleppo, it is estimated that close to 30,000 Christians are among those who have fled.

One of them, a 19-year-old Greek Catholic named Rasha who now lives in Beirut, sees little hope for Christians in the Middle East. "Unfortunately, we're a long way from a solution," he says. "This will make Christians feel threatened by death at all times and scared, of course. Not free. Not safe, and sometimes desperate."

At St. Mary's Church in Homs one day in March, Lamis, a 27-year-old woman who also gave only her first name, says her sister moved to the United Arab Emirates but she does not want to leave, even though she fears ISIS. "If I should die," she says, "at least I will die here in my home."



An Assyrian man with a red cross painted on his forehead holds a banner as he walks during a protest of several hundred people in solidarity with Christians abducted in Syria and Iraq, in downtown Beirut, Lebanon, February 28, 2015. Credit: Hussein Malla/AP

Assyrian Christians in northeastern Syria have been targeted by ISIS in recent months. More than 200 Assyrian Christians were taken hostage near the village of Hasakah in February, and ISIS forces swept through several predominantly Assyrian Christian villages, forcing thousands of people to leave.

There are Christians prepared to fight back. Kino Gabriel is the spokesman for a militia called the Syriac Military Council that was created in January 2013 to defend the Syriac people, who comprise various Christian groups, including Assyrians, Syriac Orthodox, Syriac Catholics, Chaldeans and Maronites. The council fought alongside Kurdish fighters against ISIS around Hasakah in February. "We are working to preserve our existence inside Syria," Gabriel says. "It's our homeland. Our ancestors have been here for the last three or four thousand years. If we moved away from here we would lose ourselves, our identity."

He speaks bitterly of the Assad regime, saying it has done nothing but weaken the Syriac people for the past 40 years, preventing them from teaching their language and culture. "For us it's the same threat by ISIS, by the regime and from all regimes that don't recognize the differences between peoples," he says, appealing for international military help.

The ISIS assault has been just as fierce in northern Iraq. "In addition to forcing the mass exodus from thousand-year-old villages, [ISIS militants] destroy churches, libraries and monuments to wipe out any trace of these being Christian areas," says Sajad Jiyad, the director of research at independent research consultancy Integrity in Baghdad.

That is what happened in Mosul when ISIS took over the city in June 2014. Earlier, under Saddam Hussein's despotic rule, the city was a sanctuary, home to tens of thousands of Christians. But in Mosul and other towns in the region, ISIS gave Christians an ultimatum—convert to Islam, pay a tax known as jizya or be killed. Aziz Emmanuel al-Zebari, 65, is a Chaldean Catholic who left Mosul in 2006 and moved to Ankawa, an Assyrian suburb of Erbil, in the Kurdish region of northern Iraq, where a statue of the Virgin Mary watches over the streets outside the Cathedral of St. Joseph. A professor of English at Salahaddin University in Erbil, al-Zebari says more than 125,000 Christians from Mosul and the surrounding Plains of Nineveh have been driven from their homes. He lists a string of Christian towns he says are now deserted: Qaraqosh, Karemlesh, Bartella, Bashiqa, Tel Keppe, Batnaya, Tesqopa, Alq#sh, Sharafiya. "For the last nine months the church bells have gone silent and there is not a single Christian in those villages and the city of Mosul," al-Zebari says.

William Warda, an Assyrian Christian from the Hammurabi Human Rights Organization in Baghdad, says he hears from Christians that they want to leave. "I tell them that they must stay or we will not have a Christian population," he says. "I go to northern Iraq, and I tell people to stay in their villages, not to run away, to resist. I tell them to be patient. I try to reassure them it is a temporary crisis, and it will pass."

But will it? The Center for American Progress report says what is happening to Christians in the region is an indicator of what kind of society will emerge from the chaos: "If one of the most important religious groups in the world continues to be forced out of the Middle East, this bodes negatively for pluralism, tolerance and the ability of the region's people to live interlinked with the rest of the world."



Proudly shouldering the religious symbol of a wooden cross, Arab Catholic Scouts participate in The Stations of the Cross procession for Catholic Easter in the Old City of Jerusalem, Israel on March 21, 2008. Credit: Ed Kashi/VII

LIVING IN LIMBO

There is already an example of what happens when a society fails to resolve the differences between people of different faiths. The Holy Land is still safe for Christians, but the stalemate in the Israeli-Palestinian crisis makes life there a struggle for the few Christians who remain. The

recent re-election of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, who campaigned on a hard-line ticket, offers little hope for a settlement.

In the district that includes Jerusalem, the holiest city in Christianity, the number of Christians has fallen to around 32,000, according to Bernard Sabella, an associate professor of sociology at Al-Quds and Bethlehem universities. "We need to have a political solution," he says. "All of us are living in limbo."

Raffoul Rofa, director of the Society of St. Yves, a Catholic human rights group in Israel, says about 100 Christian families he knows have recently left. "Social instability, the political situation, the building of the separation wall, the difficult economic situation," he says. "It is bleak. If this continues, the time will come when Palestine will not have Christians."

Of the 4 million Palestinians living in the West Bank and Gaza, only around 2.5 percent are Christians, and conditions there are even more difficult than in Israel.

Samia Khalilieh and her husband live with their two youngest children in Beit Jala, a West Bank town in the governorate of Bethlehem, the biblical birthplace of Jesus. She is Greek Orthodox, and the family grows olives on farmland in the Cremisan Valley. The latest threat to their way of life is Israel's proposal to extend through their farmland the separation barrier it has built to wall off the West Bank. "When the route is done, they will uproot the olive trees and excavate the land and destroy it," Khalilieh explains. "These lands are a part of our life, our culture. This is a tradition that has been there for years, from our grandfathers, our ancestors."

Khalilieh wonders whether her two eldest children will return home once they finish university in Germany. She isn't sure whether she wants them to do so. "I love my country, really I do not want to leave, but if it's going to get worse here you do not have any other option," she says. "For us, we are used to facing the occupation problems. But my children, would they stay here in this prison?

"This is the land of Christ, but without Christians here, it is like having the stones without the spirit—having all the churches here but without the spirit of the people."

— With additional reporting by Lara Adoumie and Stav Ziv.

FEATURES 2015.04.03



Peter Earl McCollough for Newsweek

FIGHTING TO RECLAIM THE FUTURE OF OAKLAND'S YOUNG BLACK MEN

A UNIQUE PROGRAM FOR BLACK BOYS IN THE EAST BAY LIGHTS A WAY OUT OF THE GHETTO.

The Oakland Unified School District's Office of African American Male Achievement is housed in a one-story portable classroom in the downtown neighborhood of Grand Lake. There are few windows in the barely glorified bunker, which may be for the best: They would just let in the incessant hum of the adjacent MacArthur Freeway. The only bathroom is across a parking lot, which is lined with a phalanx of similar portables painted a deceptively alluring sky-blue. It is somehow fitting that the highway thrums but a few feet away—maybe it reminds those who work here that the goal is to whisk the city's young out of Oakland, to Silicon Valley, to San Francisco, to any place that is better than this place that they have always known.

About three miles to the north, at 809 57th Street, is the former home of 1960s radical Bobby Seale, a modest bungalow that sold three years ago for \$425,000. In 1966, the year he helped start the Black Panther Party, Seale and fellow founder Huey Newton drafted a 10-point program for the black power movement in the dining room of that house. The fifth of those demands concerned schooling: "We want education for our people that exposes the true nature of this decadent American society. We want education that teaches us our true history and our role in the present day society."

Most people remember the Panthers for their militancy, not their pedagogy. However, in 1969 they started the Free Breakfast for School Children Program at the St. Augustine Church in Oakland, the first initiative of its kind in the nation. "It is impossible to obtain and sustain any education," the Black Panthers wrote in the fall of that year, "when one has to attend school hungry."

Today, there are still plenty of empty stomachs in Oakland: About 71 percent of the children in the school system are in the reduced-cost or free lunch program. To qualify for free lunch, a family of four has to have an annual income of \$31,000. Unemployment in "the flats"—the poor black enclaves of East Oakland—may be as high as 28 percent, five times the national rate. And it is black boys who suffer most from this nexus of urban ills. In a recent series, the San Francisco Chronicle found that between 2002 and 2012, "the number of African American men killed

on the streets of Oakland has nearly matched the number who graduated from its high schools ready to attend a state university."



Devin Billingsley, a MetWest High School student in the African American Male Achievement program works on a class assignment. Credit: Peter Earl McCollough for Newsweek

The plight of Oakland's young black boys is replicated nationwide. We may as well state plainly what we all know: Black men are this nation's outcasts, marked like Oedipus for doom from birth. They are more likely to ditch school, more likely to be arrested, more likely to end up in prison. When they are not forgotten, they are feared. When they are not scorned, they are pitied.

The handful of people in that portable classroom near the freeway is trying to change all that. Maybe they are delusional, but maybe they are more realistic than they first seem. Oakland's Office of African American Male Achievement is the first public school department in the country devoted to a problem Seale and Newton grappled with: Black boys know they are society's castaways and, often, act accordingly. In his prison memoir Soledad Brother, Black Panther George Jackson wrote that he was

"born a slave in a captive society" and all his life was "prepared for prison." So are many who have followed, nudged by unrelenting fate from one bad choice to another, from misdemeanor to felony, from sentence suspended to conviction upheld.

The experiment now being conducted in Oakland is to have black male teachers instruct black male students in an elective class called the Manhood Development Program (MDP), which currently enrolls about 450 of Oakland's 6,500 black male students. The number is meager, but the ambition is vast: instill black boys with self-respect, even pride, and send them out into the world with the conviction that they can be scientists and bankers, not just ballers and rappers.

"From nigga to king" is how Christopher P. Chatmon, who heads the Office of African American Male Achievement, describes his mission. Though he is irrepressibly optimistic (and occasionally messianic), Chatmon picked a tough place to work his magic: Oakland has never recovered from the tumult of the late '60s, the struggles of that era haunting the city throughout the decades since.

Today, tech money is starting to creep down Shattuck Avenue from Berkeley, and, yes, there are hipster saplings turning the Temescal neighborhood into a Portlandia parody. But there isn't a united Oakland that shares both the newfound wealth and the long-standing burdens of poverty. There is, instead, a white Oakland, a black Oakland and a brown Oakland, and on those rare occasions when those Oaklands speak to each other, the conversation is often impolite.

Nevertheless, the MDP has proved that urban despair can be pushed back, however slightly and slowly. When we met last month, Chatmon told me it will take 10 years for the program to prove its worth with the kind of statistics education reformers crave: graduation rates, test scores, college placements. A highly laudatory (though stat-poor) evaluation by the University of California at Davis argues that the MDP is succeeding in key areas like reducing suspensions and improving literacy and, even more important, getting young black men to realize they are not doomed. How do you tell a black kid to concentrate on his SAT prep while, nightly, the tragic visages of Michael Brown, Eric Garner and Tamir Rice flash across the screen?

The program dovetails with the federal My Brother's Keeper (MBK) initiative, announced last year by President Barack Obama. MBK shares many of the traits of the MDP: ambitious but vague, earnest yet realistic. Both programs are desperate to convince black men and boys that there is hope. How do you quantify that? Maybe you don't. Maybe you just do your best and don't look back.

'Teachers Are Afraid of Me'

"We might hope, and even expect, that school would be a place where black males are nurtured and supported, where they receive encouragement to excel," writes New York University professor of education Pedro A. Noguera in his 2008 book The Trouble With Black Boys. Noguera notes that the opposite is true, with black male students "more likely than any other group in American society to be punished (typically through some form of exclusion), labeled, and categorized for special education (often without an apparent disability), and to experience academic failure."

Noguera concludes that "the failure of black males is so pervasive that it appears to be the norm and so does not raise alarms." FEATURES 2015.04.03



Armon Hurst stands in the playground after school at Alliance Middle School. Credit: Earl McCollough for Newsweek

The schools of Oakland hint at the disconnect between American teachers and their students. Of the 1,911 teachers in Oakland, the majority (53 percent) are white, though only 12 percent of the student body is of the same race. Most of the 32,000 students (69 percent) are either black or Latino. Nationally, about three-quarters of all teachers are female, and about 83 percent are white. "We know it's important for students to see something of themselves in their teachers," says Dana Goldstein, author of The Teacher Wars. "It can be transformative to recruit more black teachers and male teachers to the profession, to serve as role models." Chatmon saw this, too, figuring that black boys had no will to succeed because they had little notion that someone who looked as they did could succeed.

Chatmon, who has seen three sons through Oakland's public schools (one now goes to high school in Berkeley), is from San Francisco. He first went to community college in San Mateo, then San Francisco State University. He taught physical education at the Marin County Day School, in

the affluent white suburbs across the Golden Gate Bridge. "It was like summer camp," he says, with an abundance of resources and capable teachers who cared. When they taught a lesson about the rain forest, he recalls, they turned the classroom into a rain forest. Later, he went to Brown for a master's degree and taught at the Wheeler School in Providence, Rhode Island, another place of privilege. The experience could have made Chatmon angry; instead, it made him hungry. It showed him "what schools can do." He went back west and started teaching at Thurgood Marshall High School in San Francisco.

In the late aughts, Chatmon ran three YMCAs in Oakland and, after that, a YMCA-based high school in San Francisco. He knew Tony Smith, then the superintendent of Oakland's schools. In the summer of 2010, the two had breakfast. Smith was dismayed by all the indicators for black boys and wanted Chatmon to do something about it. Smith had captained the football team at the University of California at Berkeley and later played in the National Football League. He told Chatmon, "I'm gonna bust a hole in the gap and hand you the ball."

FEATURES 2015.04.03



Sean Foster, center, works with MetWest High School student Myles McConico. Credit: Peter Earl McCollough for Newsweek

Chatmon shared Smith's sense of urgency: "For a father of three boys, I can't wait 10 years for systems to change. I need something now." Handed the allegorical ball by Smith, he bolted madly for the end zone. He hasn't, as far as I can tell, glanced over his shoulder since.

Chatmon describes the MDP—which started in the spring of 2011 in three schools, serving only 50 students—as an "immediate response" to the concerns he heard from black children during a "listening campaign." Even at the elementary level, black boys were acutely, dismayingly aware of how society at large saw them. "The teachers are afraid of me," he recalls them saying. "They don't want to talk to me. They don't want to engage with me." These raw feelings were coming from boys barely old enough to ride a bike. Once that injury hardens into anger, no parent or teacher can break through it. To fend off potential foes and do-gooders alike, there is the permanent armor of 'hood survival: the flat brim cap pulled low over the eyes, the menacing gait, the lupine scowl.

Chatmon knows he can't fix all this, but he may provide a model for black boys to see themselves as more than just the next victims of police brutality. And for their fellow Americans to see them as more than felons, whether actual, possible or imagined. "The nation is ready for something positive," he says.

Handcuffs and Hugs

The Alliance Academy is in the chronically distressed Oakland flatlands. It has become an axiom of public education that the more aspirational the name of a school, the worse the surrounding neighborhood. Accordingly, Reach Academy, Aspire Monarch Academy and Barack Obama Academy are all nearby. The sheen of optimism comes off easily, though. Two blocks away from Alliance Academy is Verdese Carter Park, built on soil once permeated with lead. A few miles north is the Fruitvale stop of the Bay Area Rapid Transit system, where in 2009 black teenager Oscar Grant was shot to death by a white police officer.

In 2013, a video shot at Alliance appeared on West Coast newscasts. A white male teacher (a substitute) pushes a black female student out of a classroom. She is a seventh- or eighth-grader; the teacher appears to be middle-aged. The girl barges back into the classroom, swinging. The teacher charges at her with a desk, like a matador trying to spear a bull. She deflects the assault, and they continue arguing, two crazed voices matching each other's senseless rage.

For all the young men and women in Oakland who watched the fight, the encounter surely provided what educators call a "teachable moment." Unfortunately, that lesson is unlikely to make anyone a productive member of society. This is the milieu in which Chatmon works, and works against. If he can, for starters, simply convince a kid yearning for lifetime membership in the Crips that Mr. Rosenberg's lesson on Hamlet is not the most pointless way

to spend 45 minutes on a radiant Friday afternoon, then Chatmon should maybe get a Nobel Prize.

Armon Hurst, 14, is a student at the Alliance Academy. His mother, Queliya Hurst, proudly places his current grade point average somewhere north of 3.8. Nevertheless, she says, Armon struggled with self-control, which is why she enrolled him in the MDP. She says people don't understand how sensitive black boys are and how few role models they have. At the minimum, the MDP is "somebody to give you a hug, sit down and talk to you."

A skeptic might note that the distance between a hug and Harvard is dismayingly vast. Chatmon knows it. But he also knows that a hug might keep his students out of handcuffs.

The Perils of Being Book-Smart

On an overcast winter day, Chatmon and I drove to Montera Middle School, in the hilly Piedmont Pines section of Oakland, in the better part of town. The school reflects the diversity of the Bay Area, with many black (39.7 percent) and Hispanic (20.3 percent) students but also plenty of Asians (9.8 percent) and whites (21.4 percent). Yet in the MDP class taught by "Mr. Kevin," all the eighth-graders were black boys, taught only by black male teachers.

The MDP is engaged in an extremely tricky maneuver: first allow black boys to fully acknowledge the forces stacked against them, then convince them they can be successful in the very system that oppresses them. "Without a relationship, you can't push rigor," program director manager Jerome Gourdine, a former Oakland middle school principal, told me. Although the MPD is elective, it is a credit class, not some sparsely attended club held in a basement computer lab. Students may spend the period discussing the purported racism of law enforcement, after which they may head to a classroom where a white female teacher asks them to read My Ántonia and won't take

"institutional racism" as an excuse when homework isn't done.

The program is, in some ways, a mixture of a history and English class, with a strong Afrocentric bent and a lot of time for personal reflection (there are actually two separate elective classes: "Mastering Our Cultural Identity" and "Revolutionary Literature"). Much of the class is focused on reflection and discussion. That is its main draw and biggest challenge. Fifteen-year-old boys of any race or creed are an intractable bunch. I was one once; I once taught many. They make up a naturally reticent demographic, not one whose members are ready to divulge their secret privations or to maturely confront social problems that have left entire presidential administrations helpless.

FEATURES 2015.04.03



Amari Jackson, a MetWest High School student in the African American Male Achievement program. Credit: Earl McCollough for Newsweek

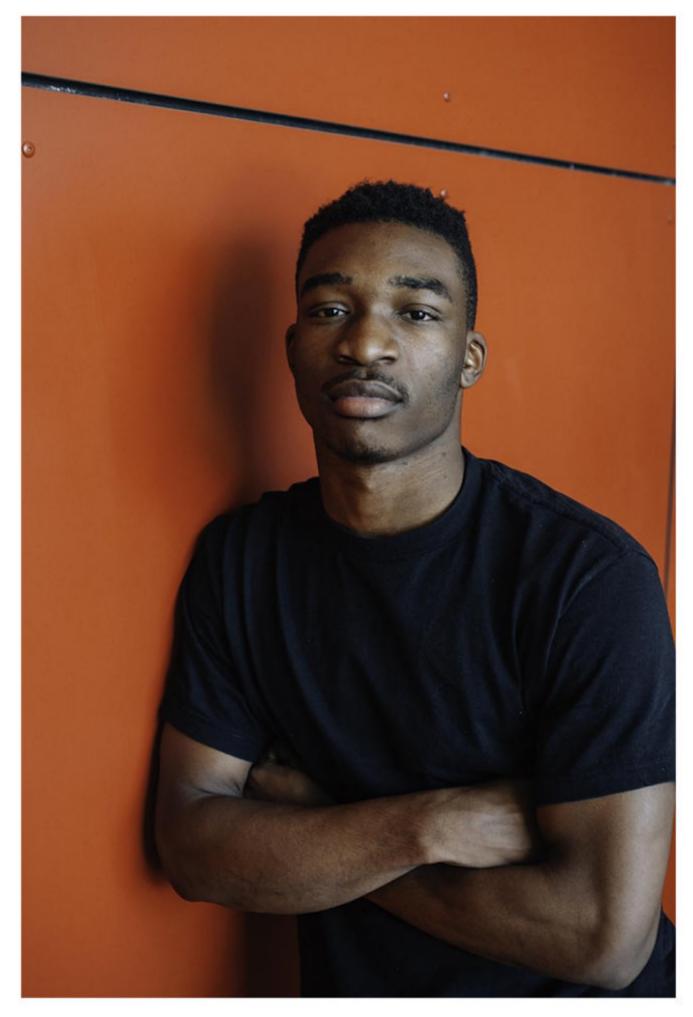
In an MDP class I saw at the MetWest High School, the students started class with push-ups, to get some physical energy out. They listened to a Bob Marley song and learned a Ghanaian word, zongo ("'hood"). There was none of the chaos I so often witnessed (and sometimes unwittingly engendered) in various classrooms around New York City. The students were almost universally respectful. When they weren't, the teacher looked somberly at the offending student and said, "I need my respect." And he got it.

"This is a serious curriculum with rigor in it," says
Baayan Bakari, an MDP program director, who explains that
getting black students in the MDP class to read something
like The Pact, a true account of three black young men who
escaped the ghettoes of Newark, New Jersey, may prime
them to tackle, say, The Catcher in the Rye in English class.

Part of the MDP's aim is to demonstrate to black boys that intellectualism isn't accessible only to whites. If you grow up in a two-parent household in Berkeley with regular trips to museums and libraries, with allusions to Daddy's college years and Mommy's favorite painting, you are so deeply inculcated with upper-middlebrow Euro-American culture that you probably don't even realize what a gift you've been given. But if you are from the projects, if you live with a mother who works nights at McDonald's, leaving you to cook dinner for your baby sister and put her to sleep, the notion of an evening spent with The Little Prince is almost offensively unrealistic. And by the time you're old enough to read, say, Pride and Prejudice, you've probably realized that some of the only black men on television are Lil Wayne, Marshawn Lynch and Michael Brown. To bother, now, with the demands of the white world would be totally pointless. Fuck that.

Chatmon stresses black achievement in the arts and sciences, and strives to kill the notion that street smarts trump book smarts. He acknowledges that the fruits of his labor "may not necessarily show up in a GPA." Not yet, at least.

FEATURES 2015.04.03



Tyrik Livingston, a MetWest High School student in the African American Male Achievement program. Credit: Peter Earl McCollough for Newsweek

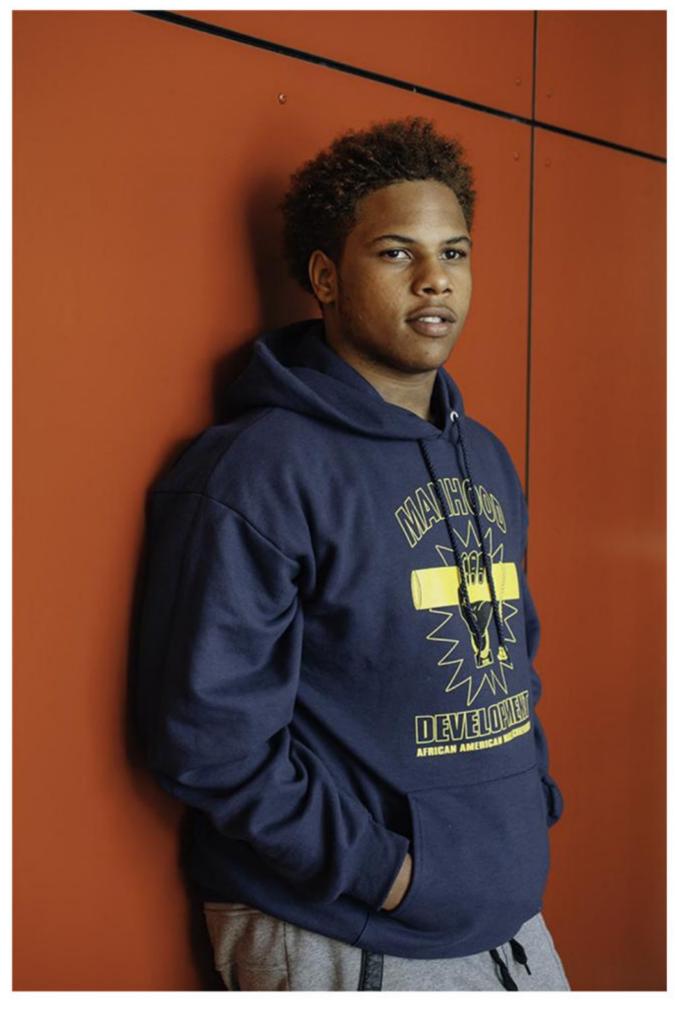
Drugs and Guns and Young Women

Black girls do better in school than black boys, but they are subject to many of the same corrosive forces. Alas, there is no program for them, nor for Hispanic or Asian students who wage plenty of battles of their own. That means, according to NYU's Noguera, that the MDP can never have more than a "marginal impact." Noguera—who knows Chatmon and has been following the program—is quick to point out that Chatmon's work is "clearly beneficial." Nevertheless, it is not enough: "You can't solve this with a mentoring program."

Vajra Watson, a social scientist at U.C. Davis, is considerably more optimistic. Her report about the MDP is titled "The Black Sonrise"; as the unabashedly earnest title probably makes clear, she thinks the MDP is a hosannaworthy triumph. Her statistics are slim comfort, however: a slight rise in GPAs, a modest improvement in reading capacity. And those may have come about only because the MDP selects motivated students. Yet, according to Watson, the MDP offers a crucial refuge for black boys. Asked to describe the experience of being young black men in America, they used words like hard, underappreciated, alone, mistreated and broke. As one student told Watson, MDP "made it cool to be black and smart."

I met Toussaint Stone, 16, at the MPD offices, where he interns. He was wearing a Beavis & Butt-head T-shirt, though it is unclear if he has ever seen the show. The next day, he showed up in a T-shirt bearing the visage of Einstein. An 11th-grader at MetWest, he comes from the sump of crime and poverty that is East Oakland. He is thinking about going to a historically black college after he graduates from high school.

"We're basically the bad guys," he says of young black men. "We're the people they don't want to see in power." When I looked at his Twitter profile, I was struck by how much he looked like Michael Brown, wearing flat-brim hat, headphones, fingers curled into what the media would surely call a "gang sign," a hashtag proclaiming his affection for women with large behinds. You could easily, if you wanted to, see him as a thug.



Toussaint Stone, a MetWest High School student in the African American Male Achievement program. Credit: Earl McCollough for Newsweek

Stone thinks that society is prejudiced against young black men but that young black men don't help their own cause. Many, he observes, have misplaced priorities: "drugs and guns and young women." His hero is Marcus Garvey, the Harlem Renaissance political thinker who advocated pulling away from a white America that would never relent in its racism. "I'm not saying let's all move to Africa," Stone told me, yet he was attracted by the message of black unity against adversities within and without.

I ask Stone if he can tell when a teacher doesn't care.

"Definitely."

I ask if he has had many such teachers.

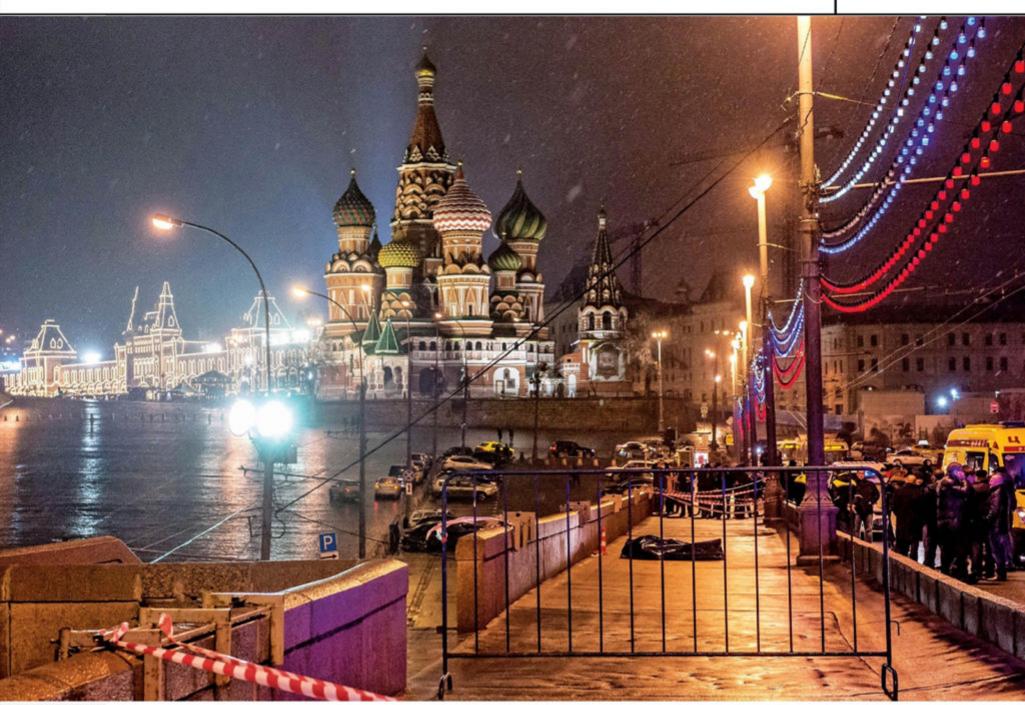
"Definitely."

I ask why he joined the MPD.

"Because I am a black male in Oakland."

He does not need to explain.

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Anadolu Agency/Getty

WHO REALLY KILLED BORIS NEMTSOV?

IT'S SCARY TO THINK VLADIMIR PUTIN WAS BEHIND NEMTSOV'S DEATH. THE MORE FRIGHTENING PROSPECT: HE WASN'T.

No Hollywood director could have framed the grim scene better—or freighted it with more symbolism. On a drizzly Moscow night, a gunman follows Boris Nemtsov, a prominent political critic, and his girlfriend across a lonely bridge. Six shots are fired. As the victim lies bleeding, the

domes of St. Basil's Cathedral and the Kremlin tower behind him. The message is clear: So die all enemies of the regime.

But who sent the message? And who was the message intended for—Russia's beleaguered opposition or President Vladimir Putin? The simplest explanation—and the one that most leaders of Russia's liberal opposition believe—is that the Kremlin killed Nemtsov to intimidate them into silence. "Putin must be held responsible for the murder of Boris," says former world chess champion and opposition leader Garry Kasparov. "Who ordered it? I don't care."

But it does matter who ordered the hit. It would be scary enough if the assassins were working at Putin's command. But it's even more frightening if they were not. And the evidence is mounting that Nemtsov was shot by a security services-connected death squad let loose in Russia's capital. Five suspects have been apprehended, all of them from Chechnya (a sixth blew himself up with a grenade rather than be taken alive, police say). The mastermind of the operation, according to Russia's Federal Security Service, or FSB, was Zaur Dadayev—a man with close ties to a Chechen rebel-turned Putin loyalist, Ramzan Kadyrov.

A 'Screw You!' to Putin

Dadayev—who confessed but later withdrew his statement, claiming he was tortured—served as the deputy commander of an Interior Ministry paramilitary unit known as Battalion Sever, which has long been the Chechen leader's Praetorian Guard. Following Dadayev's arrest, Kadyrov—using Instagram, his favored means of sharing pictures of himself in his private zoo and communicating his political views to the outside world—called the suspect "a true Russian patriot." He also suggested that Dadayev had been offended by Nemtsov's support of the Charlie Hebdo cartoonists murdered by Islamist gunmen in Paris. After evidence leaked in a Moscow newspaper indicating Dadayev had been surveilling Nemtsov's apartment long before the Paris attacks, Kadyrov began saying his lieutenant

was innocent and accused the Russian media of concocting a "conspiracy" to undermine both Dadayev and himself.

No matter who ordered Nemtsov's murder, there's little doubt that Kadyrov considered him a traitor to Russia and a personal enemy. In 2011, when Nemtsov and hundreds of thousands took to the streets in Moscow, protesting Putin's return to power, Kadyrov called for the opposition leader to be imprisoned. "Kadyrov is a very psychologically sick man," Nemtsov responded. This year, Kadyrov has been a prominent organizer of the Russia-wide "anti-Maidan" movement, the goal of which is to block the kind of anti-regime protests that toppled a corrupt, pro-Russian government in Kiev, Ukraine, last year. Nemtsov was one of the leaders of demonstrations in Moscow against the annexation of Crimea—and came under fire from Russian nationalists for appealing to the United States and the European Union to tighten sanctions against the Kremlin. Russian state-controlled TV portrayed Nemtsov and his fellow opposition leader, Alexei Navalny, as Americanfunded stooges—and Putin spoke of a "fifth column" of enemies inside Russia.

Nemtsov wouldn't be the first Kadyrov critic to wind up dead—investigative reporters Anna Politkovskaya and Natalia Estemirova were shot and killed while working on stories about corruption and violence in Chechnya. Politkovskaya was murdered outside her Moscow apartment in 2006, shortly after calling Kadyrov the "Stalin of our times." Estemirova was kidnapped and shot in Grozny in 2009 after writing about Kadyrov's alleged involvement in torture and extrajudicial executions, which he denied.

The more pressing question, though, is whether Putin is still able to control Kadyrov. Even if the Kremlin leader agrees that Nemtsov was a traitor, "that doesn't necessarily make it OK to murder him," says the long-serving editor-inchief of one of Russia's most prominent newspapers, who asked for anonymity because of the matter's sensitivity.

"The Kremlin was in shock, of course. When you have people running around the streets of Moscow choosing who lives and who dies—that's not OK." According to the newspaperman, who until his recent retirement attended regular meetings with Putin and his top lieutenants, "this was a kind of 'screw you!' to Putin. [The killers] were saying, Sure, boss, you make the rules. But we get to execute them how we like."

Going Rogue

In a political system like Russia's, where Putin has replaced formal institutions with what his supporters call "personal control," the unwritten rules of court politics are paramount. "Signals and gestures matter," says Brian Whitmore, author of The Power Vertical, an influential blog for Kremlinologists. "They have to, because the law doesn't apply to those on the top.... Killing somebody this prominent, and certainly doing the deed blocks from Red Square, was against the rules."

Whitmore and many leading Kremlin watchers see the Nemtsov assassination as part of an unfolding war among Russia's siloviki—the military, police and KGB men who control the security services. Kadyrov is among the most powerful men in Russia. He commands thousands of armed loyalists, and he described Putin as "a father" to him after the assassination of his own father in 2004. For years, the admiration was mutual. Putin even bestowed a valor medal on the Chechen strongman for pacifying his rebellious province a few days after the Nemtsov assassination—before the extent of the links between the Chechen suspects and Kadyrov emerged.

But Kadyrov has also acquired dangerous enemies, from FSB chief Aleksandr Bortnikov to top Kremlin courtiers, including Putin's chief of staff, Sergei Ivanov. Regardless of who actually ordered Nemtsov's death, Kadyrov's detractors in the security services now appear to be using the killing against him by leaking damaging details to the press.

It's not surprising that Putin's lieutenants are at loggerheads. But it would be a shocking shift if they're in fact killing their enemies in the street. If Kadyrov, for instance, has indeed gone rogue, there's little Putin can do about it. "Kadyrov has put Putin in a hopeless situation," says former parliamentarian and liberal opposition politician Konstantin Borovoi. "The Russian president can neither punish nor remove him, because Chechnya is so difficult to control."

The deeper problem is that Putin has created a system in which he has "monopolized not only the decision-making process in Russia but also the very ability to make decisions," says Putin biographer and critic Masha Gessen. When the Russian leader disappeared from public view for 10 days early in March, the country's political class grew nervous and the blogosphere traded stories about coups, strokes and even Putin's alleged love child. The rest of the country didn't seem to notice Putin's absence—despite a series of comic mix-ups on state-controlled TV when prerecorded video of the president's supposedly busy schedule aired in the wrong order. But Putin's brief disappearance offers a glimpse into just how dependent on him the Russian state has become—and suggests that chaos is likely to be Putin's principal successor.

'A Pandora's Box of Paranoia and Violence'

It wasn't always the case. Just three winters ago, liberal, middle-class supporters of departing president Dmitry Medvedev filled Moscow and St. Petersburg, demanding fair elections and more political liberty and free speech. Today, the same streets are filled with patriotic crowds waving banners saying, "Crimea is ours—Obama don't envy us," "America, keep your hands off" and "I am proud of my country." (Photos later surfaced on Russian social media of queues of these patriots, hiding their faces from the camera and apparently lining up to be paid for their attendance.) "What we are seeing now is the death throes of the old

liberal opposition," says blogger Anton Krasovsky, who worked as chief of staff for oligarch Mikhail Prokhorov's unsuccessful presidential campaign against Putin in 2012. "Boris's death was a kind of symbolic parting with the past. With him died the old legend of the Young Reformers, of the leaders of the Bolotnaya [Square] protests and so on."

After military parades marking the anniversary of the annexation of Crimea, Putin gravely told Russian TV's Channel One he had considered authorizing the use of tactical nukes in the peninsula against "the NATO threat." On the same day, leading journalist and opposition activist Ksenia Sobchak announced she was thinking of leaving Russia after she learned her name was on a Chechen hit list of liberal "traitors."

"It would be in some way less worrying if Putin had ordered Nemtsov's killing," blogged Sobchak, who has known Putin since childhood because her father was the first mayor of post-Soviet Leningrad—and Putin's boss and patron. "It would be an awful system, but at least a system, a manageable system. But this is not the case. There is no Putin who gave a command to kill. But there is a Putin who has built a hellish Terminator and he has lost control of it. There is no one controlling the process any more—there is chaotic hatred that is fueled every day by the federal mass media."

The more disturbing story behind Nemtsov's murder is that the Kremlin has opened a Pandora's box of paranoia and violence that it can no longer control. Nemtsov's killing may come to be seen as a turning point—not only as the day when the liberal opposition lost a leader but also as the day the ultranationalist death squads first took to the streets of Moscow. As Sobchak puts it, the rounds that killed Nemtsov "are only the first six bullets. There are troubled times ahead."

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Osama Faisal/AP

TALIBAN LEADERS ARE LIVING IN LUXURY IN QATAR

AND AS THE BLOODY WAR CONTINUES, SOME OF THEIR FOOT SOLDIERS ALONG THE PAKISTANI BORDER AREN'T HAPPY ABOUT IT.

Even though we hadn't seen each other in years, the Taliban official remembered me when I called. I'd heard he was living in the Gulf emirate of Qatar, and I was planning to travel there soon. Good, he said, let's meet for lunch or dinner. As I flew to Doha recently, the monarchy's

capital, I looked forward to seeing him. But by the time I landed in this futuristic city beside the sea, he wasn't so welcoming. He arrived at my hotel room looking tense and uncomfortable. "Don't use my name," he said immediately. "Don't tell anyone you've seen me. No photos. No camera. No nothing."

Several days later, I set out to see the exclusive neighborhood in suburban Doha where some of the Taliban live. But as I tried to turn onto a palm-shaded street, a guard in uniform stopped me and demanded to see my ID and a residency permit. I turned back.

In all my years of reporting on the Taliban, I've never been as stonewalled as I was by the officials who staff the Afghan insurgency's "political office" in Qatar. They make no effort to disguise themselves or their identities. Even on the streets of Doha, a city filled with throngs of expats from all over the world, the Taliban's long beards, turbans and traditional Afghan clothing stand out. Just don't expect to get answers from these guys. They don't like nosy strangers.

'Like a Five-Star Hotel'

As one of the world's wealthiest countries per capita, Qatar has always attracted ambitious Afghan men looking for jobs as truckers, builders and heavy-equipment operators. But the Taliban have their own reason to be there. In 2013 their leaders assigned them to open an office in Doha and begin exploratory peace talks with the U.S. government. Even though the meetings soon broke off, the Taliban negotiators and their families stayed on as honored guests of the emir and his people. "We have good lives here," my old acquaintance says. "We thank the state of Qatar for that."

Yet this arrangement doesn't sit well with other Afghans in Qatar. Some have long memories of beatings or imprisonments they endured when the Taliban ruled Afghanistan. Others resent the envoys' privileges. "They ride around in big fancy cars, wearing spotless white clothes and expensive sunglasses," says an Afghan businessman DOWNLOADS 2015.04.03

who has spent most of the past 30 years in Qatar. "They don't have to sweat for a living like the rest of us."



With a water tower that says "Welcome to Doha" in the background, greeters wait for U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry to de-plane on arrival in Doha, Qatar, on June 22, 2013. Credit: Jacquelyn Martin/AP

Far from it. The oil-rich state provides its Taliban guests and their families with every comfort: luxury SUVs, free medical care and air-conditioned homes the size of small castles. "Their bathrooms are bigger than our living rooms," says an Afghan who has done plumbing jobs for Taliban households in Doha. "The service they get is like a five-star hotel," says a Kabul-based Afghan intelligence officer who specializes in tracking Taliban activities in Doha. He, like almost everyone else I spoke to, asked for anonymity because of the sensitivity of the matter. According to an Afghan diplomat in Qatar, the Taliban there practically have room service: "Every morning a delivery van drives right up to each one's residence to fill orders for fresh meat, vegetables, fruit and whatever else they might need."

The Guantanamo Five Are Homesick

These emissaries haven't done much to earn their special treatment. A mutually acceptable peace plan is still no more than a distant fantasy. Although Taliban insiders and senior Afghan officials say the two sides are getting close to beginning formal talks, no date has been set. So far, the Qatar contingent can point to only one achievement of consequence: the swap that freed five senior Guantanamo prisoners last May in exchange for Bowe Bergdahl, a captured American soldier. Bergdahl remains on active duty while the Army decides whether to court-martial him on charges of desertion. Meanwhile, the Guantanamo Five are in Qatar, at Washington's behest. Under the terms of their release, they're barred from leaving the country until a year has passed. Not that they have anyplace else to go; neither Pakistan nor Afghanistan wants them, fearing they will return to the battlefield.

The emir has every reason to keep them as comfortable as possible. By accepting custody of the former Guantanamo inmates, he solved a sticky problem for the Americans and earned valuable diplomatic points in Washington. At the same time, he wants Islamists in Qatar and the rest of the Arab world to see him as sympathetic to the Taliban. Accordingly, the Guantanamo Five are also getting the royal treatment. In fact, to help them feel less homesick, each one has been allowed to bring in five other Taliban families for assistance and companionship. As of a few weeks ago, there were said to be 35 Taliban households linked to the former prisoners in and around Doha, with more expected to arrive soon.

Despite such enviable accommodations, not all of the former Guantanamo inmates seem happy. Reports are circulating among senior Taliban commanders that at least two of them are eager to leave Qatar and return to the war zone. The reunion could get ugly. One of the reputed malcontents, Mullah Fazl Akhund, was head of the Taliban regime's army until his capture during the 2001 U.S.-led

invasion. Senior Taliban members say he's convinced he should lead the insurgency. He regards Mullah Akhtar Muhammad Mansour, the current chief of the group's ruling council, as a usurper. One senior commander says members of Mansour's circle, trying to head off a power struggle, have warned Western intelligence that Fazl is likely to join ISIS if he's allowed to leave Qatar.

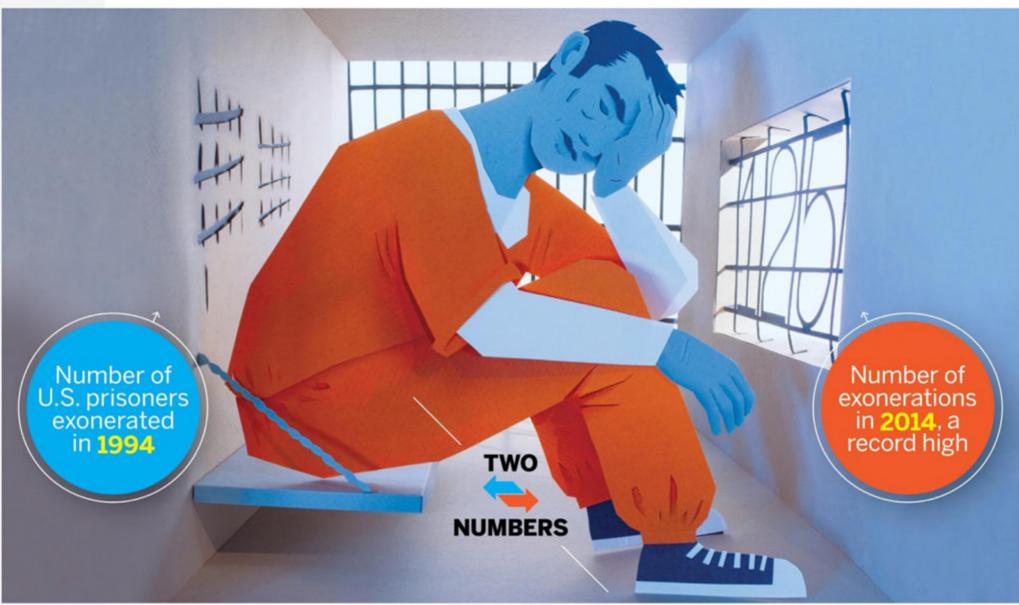
In the Pakistani borderlands, the group's followers have more pressing worries. They say they're sick of waiting for the supposed peacemakers in Qatar to deliver a deal. Not long ago I ran into a former Taliban intelligence officer who now peddles fruits and vegetables on a roadside in Peshawar. "Last night was rainy," he said. "My house has only a mud roof. I didn't know how else to keep it from collapsing, so I spent the night reciting verses from the Koran. Those guys in Qatar don't know what it's like to be cold and wet."

Mullah Abdul, a 30-year-old fighter from Kunduz province, is similarly disgusted. "If they can't get anything done at that office in Qatar, they should come back and live here like the rest of us," he says.

Even in the desert heat of Doha, the Taliban's would-be peacemakers must surely find that prospect chilling.

— With Sam Seibert in New York

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Maëlle Doliveux

EXONERATIONS ARE ON THE RISE, THANKS TO DEDICATED JUSTICE UNITS

IN THE PAST 20 YEARS, OVERTURNED CONVICTIONS IN THE U.S. HAVE RISEN BY OVER 300 PERCENT.

In early March, Angel Gonzalez, 41, was exonerated in the abduction and rape of an Illinois woman, for which he had been imprisoned for 20 years. According to the victim's testimony—backed up by DNA samples—two

men committed the crime. But new DNA testing in January revealed that Gonzalez did not match either of the two male DNA profiles found.

The proving of Gonzalez's innocence is part of a growing trend: In 2014, a record 125 people convicted of crimes were absolved of wrongdoing nationwide. The preceding two years also saw record highs in the U.S., with 91 exonerations each. For perspective, in 1994, the year of the crime that changed Gonzalez's life, just 31 convictions were reversed.

Most of this is due to recent advancements within the criminal justice system. Reversals in cases like Gonzalez's —where DNA played a central role—have remained steady in the past two decades. "DNA cases depend on a technological change between the time of trial and the time of exoneration," says Samuel Gross, a University of Michigan professor of law and editor of the National Registry of Exonerations. He explains that the majority of recent DNA-based exonerations are for murders carried out before DNA was the standard of proof.

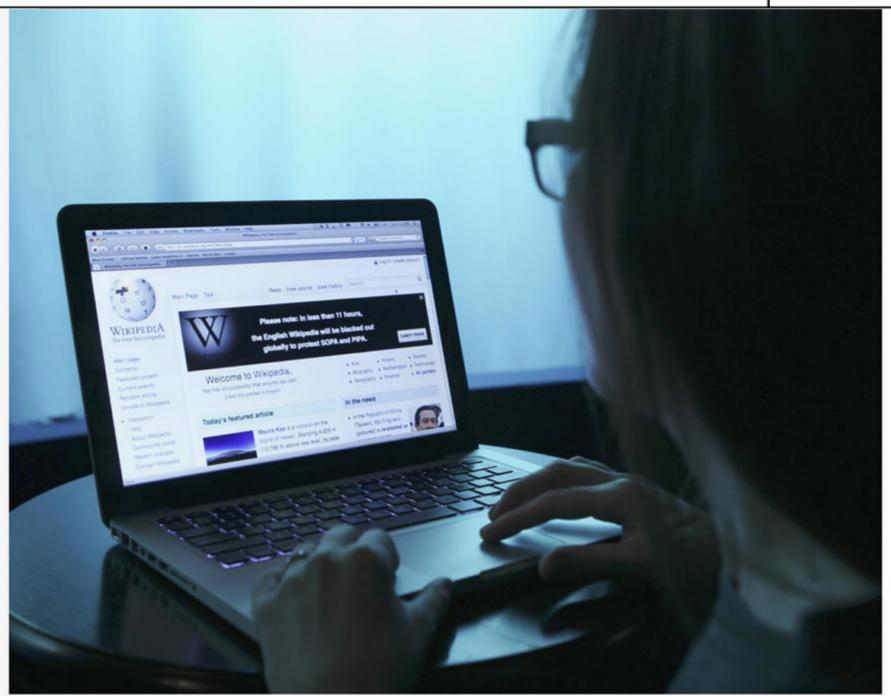
But exonerations that do not rely on DNA have skyrocketed, rising from 22 in 1994 to 103 in 2014. Many of these were drug crimes; in 1994, only three people were found innocent after a drug crime conviction, but by 2014 that number had risen to 39. The spike is partially attributable to 33 Texas cases in which most of those convicted pleaded guilty to drug charges before the alleged drugs had been tested. Severely delayed results later revealed that the items in their possession were not illegal.

The swelling number of exonerations can be attributed to the increase in resources dedicated to investigating possible wrongful convictions, says Gross. The most prominent example is the formation of Conviction Integrity Units (CIUs)—staff within district attorney offices exploring claims of innocence. In 1994, there were no such units. In 2013, nine CIUs were responsible for 8 percent of the

exonerations. In 2014, the number of CIUs jumped to 15, and they tallied 39 percent of that year's exonerations.

Analysts believe that as CIUs become increasingly successful, government support and funding will increase, ensuring that they become more plentiful. And as they do, the number of people freed from prison will grow.

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Gary Cameron/Reuters

MANIPULATING WIKIPEDIA TO PROMOTE A BOGUS BUSINESS SCHOOL

WIKIPEDIA HAS BANNED AN ADMINISTRATOR FOR DELETING NEGATIVE STORIES ABOUT A FAKE BUSINESS SCHOOL IN INDIA.

In February, "ArbCom" voted to expel "Wifione" from Wikipedia.

No idea what "ArbCom" is? You're not the only one. It's the Wikipedia Arbitration Committee, the highest court in Wikipedia land. And Wifione was a Wikipedia "administrator" account, run by persons unknown, that was accused of manipulating the Wikipedia site of an unaccredited business school in India by deleting links to numerous media reports alleging it scammed students into paying hefty sums for worthless degrees.

For four years, that Wikipedia page was a primary marketing tool of the Indian Institute of Planning and Management (IIPM), which at one time boasted a network of 18 branches and tens of thousands of students. It lured students with the promise of an MBA and partnerships with international universities in the United States and Europe.

Last September, the High Court of Delhi ruled that those promises were misleading and that IIPM was not accredited to confer any degrees.

So this isn't just a question of obscure Wikipedian politics. It's a tale that demonstrates how Wikipedia can be cynically manipulated by companies, and how the credibility of the website is, especially in the developing world, a powerful and potentially dangerous tool.

The Wifione account, which the Arbitration Committee has now banned indefinitely from editing the site, had been active since 2009. "They managed to blend in, like a chameleon," said Andreas Kolbe, an experienced Wikipedia editor. "Wifione offered to do administrative donkey work, said the right things about how inspiring 'the project' is and was unfailingly polite."

Wifione's helpfulness eventually bore fruit—the account was promoted to an "Administrator." "Admins have a huge advantage in Wikipedia," explains Kolbe. "The default assumption is that they are 'good guys."

Wifione's primary purpose from that point appeared to be to monitor IIPM's Wikipedia page. If criticism of the business school appeared, Wifione would use its influence to remove it, according to the Arbitration Committee.

In 2009, Careers360, an English-language magazine about the Indian education industry, started publishing a series of investigative stories about IIPM. The magazine noticed that in its advertising literature, IIPM claimed it was linked to a Belgian business school called IMI Belgium, styling its course as a premium "European MBA." But Careers360 published what it said was a letter from Belgian education authorities saying IMI Belgium was not accredited and had no legal authority to grant MBAs. (The Delhi High Court found IMI Belgium was nothing more than an "alter ego or another face of IIPM.")

IIPM also advertised partnerships with a number of foreign institutions, including the University of Buckingham in Britain. Careers360 reported that Buckingham University had told it that it had no formal agreement with IIPM— a report judged to be true by a court in the Indian state of Uttarakhand that dismissed a libel suit over the story. The magazine also reported that many of IIPM's graduates were unable to find work or ended up working for IIPM as lecturers, at much lower salaries than they might have expected from the advertising that had lured them. The magazine also found that neither of India's official educational bodies had accredited IIPM's so-called MBAs. (The Delhi court ruling confirmed this too.)

"My parents re-mortgaged their farm to pay for this degree," one former student was quoted as saying. "I'm just too scared to tell them it was a fraud. It's better they just think I have an MBA. It would break their heart."

Like many who attended IIPM, the student, who did not want to be identified, said she was unable to find management work after graduating, despite the school's promise that the degree would open doors at some of India's leading companies. Students paid up to \$15,000 for IIPM's courses. "What IIPM was really selling was aspiration," says Mahesh Peri, publisher of Careers360, which has successfully defended itself against two libel suits over its reporting on the school. (Several more suits filed in courts around India are still grinding their way through the slow and fragmented system.)

Financial documents from 2010 reported by Careers360 show IIPM reported revenues of about \$39 million.

In its September ruling, the Delhi High Court ordered IIPM to stop making false claims in its advertising and to post the court ruling on its website, making it clear that it had no authority to confer degrees of any kind. The court also noted that IIPM may be liable "in any action taken by any other person for having been misled in the past"—effectively opening the door for students to sue the school.

Calls to the offices of IIPM were not returned. Arindam Chaudhuri, the sharp-suited dean of IIPM and a self-styled "management guru," did not respond to numerous calls for comment on this story, and his whereabouts could not be ascertained. He also did not respond to messages sent by email and to his Facebook page. Peri believes he may have left India.

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Arindam Chaudhuri, the sharp-suited dean of the Indian Institute of Planning and Management (IIPM), Bollywood movie producer and a self-styled "management guru," is pictured at a film awards ceremony in New Delhi in 2009. Wikipedia was manipulated to promote IIPM, an unaccredited business school. Credit: Sipra Das/India Today Group/Getty

Chaudhuri, whose portrait was featured in IIPM's glossy adverts, once boasted to journalists that he drove a Bentley Continental and enjoyed drinking champagne at the Ritz hotel in London. Like many successful Indian businesspeople, Chaudhuri had also produced his own Bollywood movie, a medium-budget gangster flick. He projected success and the fruits of aspiration—an aspiration shared by the much poorer families IIPM targeted.

After the negative articles came out about IIPM, it became harder to attract students through conventional marketing. That was when IIPM's Wikipedia page became its primary lure, though it has never been conclusively proved that Wifione was being run by Chaudhuri or his company. Wifione began operating on the site around the same time critical articles about IIPM began to surface.

Many of the articles Wifione removed from IIPM's Wikipedia page were from Careers360. In 2011, another

magazine, The Caravan, interviewed Chaudhuri and published a highly critical investigation. The link to this, too, was removed from the Wikipedia page.

In the place of those and other negative articles, false claims that Peri had lost the libel cases Chaudhuri filed against him sprung up. The Wikipedia page also now emphasized a link, praising IIPM, to a newspaper called The Pioneer. It turned out the article in the link was an advertorial (paid content designed to look like a news story), according to Peri, who showed Newsweek what he said was an email exchange with The Pioneer's editor, Chandan Mitra, confirming that was the case. "There was this endless battle of claims and counterclaims," Peri says.

The Wikipedia Arbitration Committee believes Wifione was at one time operating over 60 so-called "sock-puppet" accounts, fake users run by the same person that can be used to out-vote rival editors who want to make a change. Members even found evidence of two sock-puppet accounts threatening editors with violence if they didn't back off, according to a Wikipedia editor.

For poor students from rural areas of India, Wikipedia was often the only source of information they could use to research which business school to attend. "They don't really understand how Wikipedia works. It is just a web page to them," Peri says.

In 2013, IIPM got an unexpected boost for its page. A new initiative launched by Jimmy Wales's Wikimedia Foundation offered free access to Wikipedia from mobile phones. The program, Wikipedia Zero, launched in India and other parts of the developing world, including Thailand, Myanmar, Morocco, Ghana and Malaysia.

"In my opinion, by letting this go on for so long, Wikipedia has messed up perhaps 15,000 students' lives," Peri says. "They should have kept track of Wifione and what they were doing—they were just so active."

The Wikimedia Foundation is apologetic but won't be offering compensation. In a statement, it said, "The Wikimedia Foundation was very disappointed to hear of the allegations of fraud committed by IIPM and Wifione. If true, it was a tremendous violation of the trust and good faith of our editors and readers. We will continue to work to support our editors and administrators in serving as a vigilant defense against such incidents and in hopes that they can prevent future incidents like this from occurring."

When asked about Wikipedia Zero, the foundation said, "The feedback we have received from people around the world confirms that free access to Wikipedia has made a positive difference in their lives."

British writer and researcher Roger Davies, who sat on the Wikipedia Arbitration Committee for the past seven years, explains that spotting malicious accounts like Wifione isn't as easy as you'd think. "Wifione got away with it for so long because it was cleverly done. It was only with the aggregate view, taken over many years, that you can see what's going on in cases like this."

Davies also argues that judging whether a page about a business is accurate or not is difficult, without knowing about that industry in depth.

Tonda Vejvancicky, another veteran Wikipedia editor, says there could be many more stories like the Wifione-IIPM case. "Often nobody notices, or nobody cares. The project has become too big to be manageable by its current editorial staff."

Kolbe believes the site's flaws are felt more keenly outside the West. "People in the developing world don't always understand how Wikipedia is created. It's such a credible website, it comes so high up the search rankings—people think it's just another encyclopedia."

Follow Alastair Sloan on Twitter at @AlastairSloan.

NEW WORLD 2015.04.03



Steve Gschmeissner/Science Source

3-D SILK STRUCTURE ENABLES SCIENTISTS TO GROW BLOOD CELLS OUTSIDE THE BODY

THE MODEL COULD HELP TREAT PLATELET FUNCTION DISORDERS.

Your blood isn't the uniform river of red it appears to be. It's actually made up of many, varied cells. One class of blood cells is the platelets, which are small, and circulate throughout the blood to activate clotting and stop bleeding. When platelet function is impaired—such as in the case of thrombocytopenia, hemophilia and more than 200 other conditions, according to the Platelet Disorder Support Association—patients run the risk of bleeding in greater, life-threatening amounts. If the blood does not clot, patients may bleed out and die.

Treatments for platelet function disorders have many drawbacks. Platelet transfusions are common, but the process requires donors, and complications due to immune responses are frequent and unpredictable. Sometimes drugs will be prescribed to block antibodies—immune cells—from attacking platelets. A last resort is the removal of a patient's spleen, which eliminates a substantial site of antibody production. But even that doesn't always improve platelet count.

A team of researchers at Tufts University School of Engineering in Massachusetts and the University of Pavia in Italy, however, believe they may have a solution: create functioning human platelets outside of the patient's body. They've created a model that acts exactly like human bone marrow, the environment within the body that stimulates platelet growth.

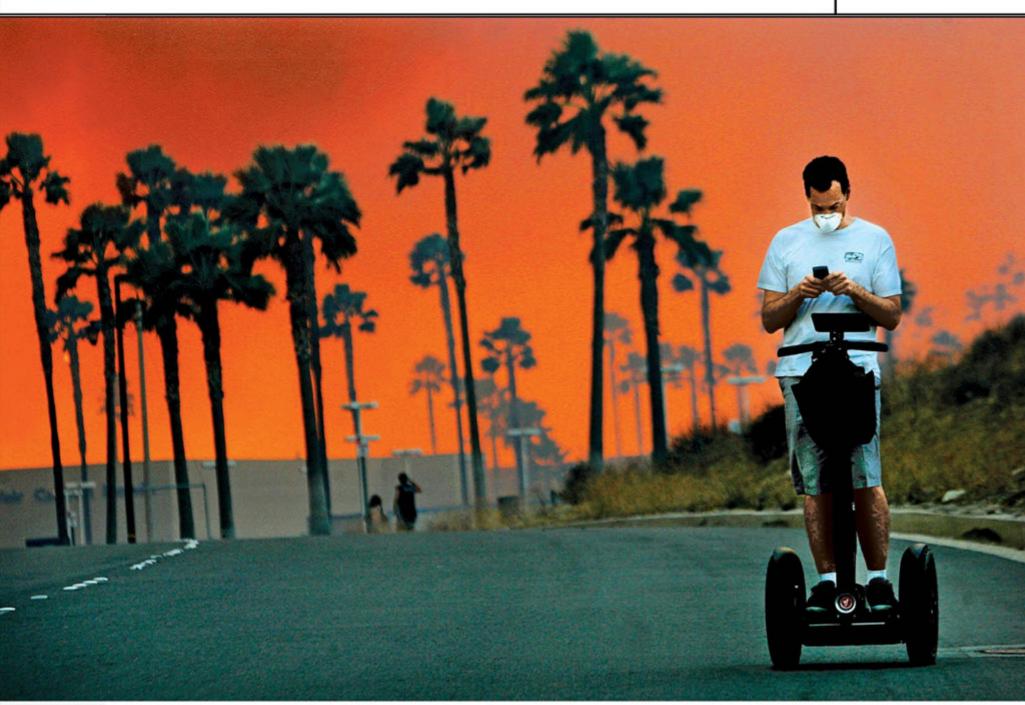
By building microtubes spun of silk, collagen and fibronectin, and surrounding these tubes with a pervious silk sponge, the scientists were able to mimic the porous environment of bone marrow outside of the body. Once the environment was created, researchers implanted patient-cultured megakaryocytes—the cells that produce platelets—into the system. Reacting as they would if in actual bone marrow, the megakaryocytes went to work, and the researchers had a platelet-making system on their hands.

According to Dr. David Kaplan, one of the lead researchers on the team, silk was key to the process. Because of its structure, silk can be made in varying degrees of stiffness and different forms, which researchers have found affects the formation and release of authentic platelets. Most

important, silk does not cause the platelets to clot, meaning that functional platelets can be gathered from the system and used later on—without the quality and storage problems created by donor platelets.

The system doesn't yield as many platelets as healthy human bone marrow, but the researchers are optimistic that they can up that. Of course, it may be a while before the system can be used to treat humans. "The big test is if it can work just as well, or even better in animal trials," says Dr. Mortimer Poncz of the Children's Hospital of Philadelphia. If it's not successful in this context, it's not a viable solution. He notes, however, that "it is a nice step forward."

Megakaryocytes cultured from patients could also allow researchers to design patient-specific treatment courses. The researchers hope future applications will go beyond blood disorders, and include healing ulcers and burns, regenerating bone tissue for dentistry and even certain kinds of plastic surgery. NEW WORLD 2015.04.03



Sandy Huffaker/Redux

BEYOND EMAIL: THE NEW FRONTIER OF COMMUNICATION

WE DON'T YET KNOW WHAT THE IDEAL FORM OF COMMUNICATION IS, BUT WE ARE SURE IT'S NOT EMAIL.

Hillary Clinton's email controversy clearly, conclusively proves one thing: She is old.

Relying so heavily on email makes her look like the kind of old person who still loves Wheel of Fortune and those vinyl outdoor tablecloths with the fuzzy undersides. The only way she can seem older is if she checks email on a big desktop PC while playing polka records and waiting for the coffee to perk.

To younger generations, email is technology's cockroach: Everyone despises it but can't kill it. Still, there's a good reason email endures. We haven't really decided on the future of communication for a mobile-driven era. So we're in a period of wantonly trying just about everything—apps like Snapchat, Yik Yak, Slack and Yammer, which together sound like the names of the comic relief in a Disney movie.

CEOs and management thinkers believe modern work must be collaborative, but most of the time the people collaborating will never be in the same physical space, or work for the same company or even know each other. We've been tearing down a century-old way of working, centered on the office, but haven't yet solidified a new way, centered on the smartphone.

In that void, email remains the constant. We can't kill it because it's the only communications tool since the telephone that is universal. As company walls and national borders break down in cyberspace, email—cumbersome time-suck though it may be—is the only way we can share ideas and digital matter with nearly anyone, anywhere.

But, of course, it won't always be that way. Then the question is: What's next? And in that question is an interesting tension—a tension Hillary would probably appreciate. We don't seem to know whether the future of communication should be as ethereal as talking, as permanent as writing or, somehow, both.

Talk disappears. You say something, it's received, and it's gone, lodged only in people's memories. In work situations, this has advantages. Soon after last year's hacking attack on Sony, which revealed damaging executive emails to the public, famous business bro Mark Cuban told a New

York audience about his latest project, Cyber Dust. The app, aimed at business, lets people communicate with individuals or a group by typing on a phone or keyboard, but as soon as any text is read it disappears from every device and the Cyber Dust servers. Even in legal proceedings, he says, "it's discovery-free." No hack or investigation could ever find it.

This ethereal trend first got momentum with Snapchat. Yik Yak takes it to another level, allowing people to anonymously spew any message to groups of people, the equivalent of ranting on a street corner while wearing a ski mask. Cuban and others making these kinds of apps raise a good point: Collaboration can be messy, and maybe it shouldn't all be captured. Maybe if the conversation disappears, people will worry less about bringing up the crazy idea that might sound stupid later, or criticizing a colleague who screws up. Talking served us well for thousands of years, so maybe there's something to it.

Slack argues the opposite. It is the latest would-be email killer—essentially a mashup of online chat, Dropbox-like file-sharing and group-messaging apps on mobile phones. Slack is so hot, the company has already raised \$120 million in funding, valuing it at more than \$1 billion. It is one year old.

The app saves every collaborative conversation and uploaded file, archiving it and making it searchable to everyone in a defined group, which could be a small team or a whole corporation. In one sense, it mimics the permanence of paper from a time when companies would file handwritten memos and typed letters for posterity. Then Slack adds a layer of Googliness, exposing the documents to be found, sorted and built upon. For better or worse, Slack and apps like it preserve every utterance with the kind of determination God put into blasting the Ten Commandments into rock.

The emergence of apps such as Cyber Dust and Slack coupled with news like the Sony hack point out a great flaw

in email: It lands somewhere between talking and writing, and it is too little of either. We can delete email, but it doesn't disappear; it remains on someone else's computer or the server, making it dangerously faux-private. We can use email to do work and construct ideas, yet colleagues who aren't on the string can't see it. Frustration with email carries a warning: In future communications technology, make it very clear whether we're talking or writing.

Artificial intelligence and location awareness might help with that. No doubt those technologies will be part of whatever comes after Slack, and they will help apps understand what's being discussed, who's in the virtual room and where all the participants are in the real world. The app could know in a particular situation whether we need to be talking or writing—whether the conversation should be private and perishable, or public and shareable.

And even then, no new technology will kill email unless it becomes universal. The cockroach might survive every extermination attempt until the sun burns out.

In the meantime, forward-thinking people are trying the new apps and helping to shape a better form of communication and collaboration. In there is a lesson for Hillary. In one fell swoop, she could duck questions about deleting messages, plus seem a lot more hip.

All she has to do is stick to Snapchatting taunts to Vladimir Putin...who would totally reply by sending barechested selfies.

NEW WORLD 2015.04.03



Nelson Feitosa/IBAMA/Reuters

BRAZIL'S DEFORESTATION RATES ARE ON THE RISE AGAIN

CORRUPTION, LAND FRAUD AND LACK OF GOVERNMENT OVERSIGHT COULD LEAD TO AN ECOLOGICAL DISASTER IN THE AMAZON.

In a world hungry for environmental success stories, Brazil has been the closest thing we have to a golden child. The nation, Latin America's largest economy, has been growing at an impressive clip, weathering the global financial crisis while cutting deforestation rates in the Amazon to historic lows. Citing its success in protecting the earth's largest rain forest, President Dilma Rousseff boasted that Brazil is "one of the most advanced countries" for sustainable development, on World Environment Day last June.

But it is too soon to declare victory in the Amazon. Corruption, lawlessness and massive land fraud are now threatening those gains, and an aggressive new development push in the region may soon open remote areas of the forest to being cut.

Between 2005 and 2010, Brazil's greenhouse gas emissions plunged by 39 percent, declining faster than in any other country. Brazil accomplished this by slashing its deforestation rate by more than three-quarters, mostly in the Amazon basin. (Burning forests to clear them is the second biggest source of greenhouse gases after the combustion of fossil fuels, accounting for 30 percent of the carbon dioxide produced by human activities, according to one U.N. study.)

But lately, the trend has reversed. After increasing slightly in 2013, the pace of deforestation has more than doubled in the past six months, according to an analysis of photographs from Brazil's SAD monitoring system, which analyzes NASA satellite imagery and provides monthly updates on the state of the forest. Most of the recent clearing is to create cattle pasture in the "frontier states" of Para and Mato Grosso in the eastern and southern Amazon, respectively. "I don't like to look at the Amazon forest as something that could be gone in 30 or 40 years," says Rita Mesquita, a senior researcher with Brazil's National Institute for Research in the Amazon (INPA). "But that may be where we are headed if we don't change course."

Brazil still has a lot going for it. It has the largest network of protected areas of any country on Earth and strict logging rules, and it requires big landowners in the Amazon to maintain at least 50 percent of their holdings in native forest. But there is a widening gap between the NEW WORLD 2015.04.03

stringent laws and the often-nonexistent enforcement, says Christian Poirer, a Brazil specialist with the advocacy group Amazon Watch. "There is basically a climate of impunity," says Poirer. "Only one percent of the fines that IBAMA [the Brazilian Institute of Environment and Renewable Natural Resources] levels on individuals and corporations for illegal deforestation are actually collected." This agency, which is responsible for implementing Brazil's environmental laws, is, he says, "woefully underfunded and understaffed."

A report last May by Greenpeace blames weak government oversight for "the Amazon's silent crisis"—the widespread practice of timber laundering, in which trees are illegally harvested and then given apparently clean documentation to facilitate their sale. The Amazon watchdog group Imazon estimates that between August 2011 and July 2012, 78 percent of logging in Brazil's largest timber producer, Para state, was illegal.



A cowboy drives cattle at a farm in Sao Felix do Xingu, Para state, northern Brazil, August 8, 2013. Credit: Yasuyoshi Chiba/AFP/Getty

There have been some high-profile efforts to crack down on the criminal networks that control the booming trade in contraband timber. Late this past February, Ezequiel Antonio Castanha, the alleged kingpin of a huge land clearance syndicate in Para, who officials say was responsible for up to 10 percent of the illegal deforestation in Brazil, was arrested in a joint operation by federal police and national security forces. Castanha is said to have hired squatter gangs to illegally occupy and clear federal forest reserves, then sell the land to speculators in the south of Brazil.

That a landgrab in a forest reserve is even possible is a testament not just to corruption and weak enforcement, says Poirer, but to an astonishing level of legal ambiguity about land title in Brazil. "Only about 14 percent of the privately occupied land in the Amazon is backed by a secure land deed," he says. "[Squatters] rely on the absence of genuine land titles to overburden the system with fraudulent titles, which plays into the hands of deforestation mafias seeking to avoid detection and accountability."

Then there's the much-lauded soy moratorium, an agreement by major food companies, in partnership with the Brazilian government, to stop buying soybeans grown on forest-cleared land. It has been one of the main drivers in slowing down deforestation, but Philip Fearnside, a research professor in the Department of Ecology at INPA, reports that farmers have routinely flouted the ban by cutting the rain forest to plant crops like rice or corn for a year or so, and then quietly changing over to soy. It is yet another loophole in Brazil's confusing labyrinth of environmental regulations.

In her initial run for president, in 2010, Dilma Rousseff pledged a zero-tolerance policy for deforestation. But, according to Fearnside, once in office she allied herself with the so-called ruralist bloc, a coalition of wealthy farmers and agribusinesses that helped rewrite the country's landuse laws in their own favor. Meanwhile, she continued to try to appear pro-conservation: Fearnside alleges that the embarrassing new deforestation numbers were deliberately

"hidden" until after the presidential vote this past November, in which Rousseff was elected to a second term. (In an email to Newsweek, a ministry spokesman, Francisco J.B. Oliveira Filho, denied the allegation.)

Recently, she has become more brazen. In a clear signal of the government's new priorities, Rousseff appointed Kátia Abreu, a former rancher from the Amazonian border state of Tocantins, as minister of agriculture in December. Abreu, the former head of Brazil's Confederation of Agriculture and Livestock, is nicknamed the "chain saw queen" by environmentalists. Abreu says the nation has been listening to those environmentalists for too long. "There are many things holding back progress—the environmental issue, the Indian issue and more," Abreu says. "But even with these problems, we keep producing high levels of productivity. Imagine how high it might be without those obstacles."

Equally worrying is the man just chosen to be Brazil's minister of science, technology and innovation, Aldo Rebelo, who has been saying that talk of global warming is "scientism" not science, calling it a tool used by Western imperialists to control poor countries. Without the support of the scientific community, Amazonia would be doomed: One of the main arguments for not cutting the rain forest is the devastating effect the increased carbon emissions would have on the global climate.

The government's saving grace might be the fact that it also employs scientists like Fearnside, who are conducting cutting-edge research on the impact of global warming on tropical climate systems. The handlebar-mustached scientist occupies a basement office in Brazil's sprawling Amazon research facility in Manaus, with a Greenpeace map, streaked in red to mark newly deforested areas, pinned to the wall. He blames the growing rise in cutting, in large part, on the Forest Code, enacted in 2012, which rolled back crucial protections for the rain forest and declared an amnesty for those who violated environmental laws

before 2008. "If you cleared illegally, you got away with it," Fearnside said. "And the expectation is that if you clear illegally now, sooner or later there will be another amnesty that will forgive your past crimes. On the other hand, if you actually obeyed the law, you lost money. So the incentives are very perverse."

Then there is the recent spate of dam construction. Fearnside has been a leading critic of the Belo Monte dam on the remote Xingu River, which he claims has been a technological boondoggle and will be an environmental nightmare when it is completed in 2019, converting flooded vegetation in the vast reservoir into the potent greenhouse gas methane. The Brazilian government counters that tapping the vast hydropower potential in the Amazon is helping to keep it a world leader in alternative energy. The natural resource-rich country produces 85 percent of its power from renewables.

"The government now plans to build 29 major dams and 80 smaller dams on the Tapajos River, which is amongst the last free-flowing tributaries in the Brazilian Amazon," says Poirer. The proposed São Luiz do Tapajós hydroelectric project would be the third biggest in the country and cost an estimated \$11.2 billion to build. The dam would flood large tracts of land controlled by the indigenous Munduruku people, one of the largest culturally intact native groups remaining in the country, numbering 13,000 individuals. In addition, dam construction brings in large new populations to the Amazon. Once the projects are complete, unemployed construction workers often fan out into the hinterland and clear the jungle for farms, greatly increasing deforestation.

Despite protests from the Federal Public Ministry (an independent agency of the Brazilian government that defends the rights of minority groups), the Tapajos dam project seems likely to go ahead. So too does the plan for a major new highway that would run from the city of Manaus through the still-pristine heart of the Amazon to the so-called

arc of deforestation, a large swath of the southern Amazon largely cleared for soy plantations. The new road is part of an ambitious five-year plan for development in Brazil. "In the Amazon, 95 percent of the deforestation takes place next to roads or next to navigable rivers," warns Poirer. "These roads mean access, they mean forest destruction."

And a relatively new threat, hydrocarbon development, is booming in the western Amazon, where oil and natural gas fields are being discovered every year. The pressures on Brazil to further develop Amazonia for energy and agriculture are enormous. And so are the stakes for a region that is on the front line of the global fight to control climate change and to preserve the world's diminishing biodiversity.

It's too soon to concede defeat, says Fearnside. "There are lots of groups working here putting pressure on the government to change course," he says. "Brazil is a very diverse place, including the Brazilian government, which includes many people who are very concerned about [the environment], so it's important not to become fatalistic. "

Still, it's hard to be optimistic. "The Amazon's destiny is extremely fragile at the moment," warns Fearnside, adding that the gains of previous decades are in the hands of lawmakers and bureaucrats who have shown little love for environmental protection. "It can all be changed with the stroke of a pen."

NEW WORLD 2015.04.03



David Kasnic

COLLEGE KIDS ARE UNKNOWINGLY ROLLING ON BATH SALTS

LAW ENFORCEMENT AND ADVOCACY GROUPS SAY "MOLLY" HAS BECOME NOTHING MORE THAN A MARKETING TERM.

Emergency responders in Middletown, Connecticut, home to Wesleyan University, knew something was wrong when they made seven runs to student housing on February

22, 2015. Eight people were showing symptoms consistent with drug overdoses, and by the end of the day, four more had sought medical help. Some went to nearby Middlesex Hospital; four were airlifted some 20 miles north to Hartford Hospital, which treats patients with more critical conditions.

"A couple of them were in some serious dire straits," says Middletown Fire Chief Robert Kronenberger, whose department transported people to the hospital. To revive one unconscious student, medics performed chest compressions and six shocks from a defibrillator, according to reports. "We've never had anything to this extent," Kronenberger says.

The patients from Wesleyan—10 students and two visitors—said they had taken molly, a nickname associated with the "pure form" of MDMA, 3,4-methylenedioxymethamphetamine, more commonly known as Ecstasy. But medical experts who spoke with Newsweek say the students likely didn't know what they ingested, citing a recent trend that has had dangerous and sometimes deadly results for young people.

"A lot of the patients that we see coming in saying that they've taken molly, it usually turns out that they haven't actually taken MDMA," says Dr. Mark Neavyn, director of medical toxicology at Hartford Hospital, where the Wesleyan students were treated. "[Molly] just becomes this vehicle for drug dealers to hop on and sell their product with ease, and [there is] this false sense of security, with a drug named after the girl next door."

Data show that when it comes to buying molly, especially in recent years, people aren't always getting what they think. The Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) says that of 143 seized substances believed to be molly and analyzed between 2009 and 2013, only 13 percent actually contained some MDMA; even then, it was not necessarily pure. "You don't know what adulterants are in there, what contaminants are in there, what it's been cut with. You truly

NEW WORLD 2015.04.03

are playing Russian roulette," says DEA spokeswoman Barbara Carreno.



A unknown teen sits in the basement of a club in Atlanta, Ga. in 2010. Data show that when it comes to buying molly, especially in recent years, people aren't always getting what they think. Credit: David Kasnic

Drug checking or testing kits are also turning up troubling results about the chemicals found in what is supposedly pure MDMA. Ecstasydata.org, an independent laboratory pill-testing program run by the Erowid Center, instructs people on how to mail tablets to labs for testing, and then publishes the results. It says that of 54 samples believed to be Ecstasy it tested this year, only about one-quarter contained just MDMA; about another quarter contained no MDMA whatsoever.

DanceSafe, a public health organization geared toward the electronic music community, does on-site testing at nightclubs and music festivals. Missi Wooldridge, executive director of the organization, says about half of the time, those on-site molly tests turn up something other than MDMA. "Molly is just a marketing term," she says. "Really, molly is a mystery substance that people often take with the

intent to roll, and the majority of the time it isn't MDMA or it contains little MDMA mixed with other substances."

The percentage of college-age people who reported using MDMA at least once in their lifetime has remained steady since 2011, but federal drug seizure numbers show enormous decreases in MDMA cases, while classes of designer drugs are on the rise. The DEA says that shift suggests people don't know what they're getting when a drug dealer sells them molly.

Take Florida. In the Sunshine State, in 2010 there were 1,367 cases in which law enforcement confiscated either MDMA or cathinones, "the category of synthetic drugs that was referred to as bath salts a few years ago," says Jim Hall from the Center for Applied Research on Substance Use and Health Disparities. Of those, 98.9 percent involved MDMA. By last year, the total number of cases there had more than doubled, but only 4.4 percent involved MDMA. Such shifts are happening nationally as well: Forensic labs around the country saw 19,088 fewer MDMA reports in 2012 than they did in 2007—a 78 percent drop—while the number of reports involving synthetic cathinones over that period went from just one to more than 14,000. And in 2008, the DEA seized 2,438.8 kilograms of MDMA powder. In 2012, the number was just 432.7 kilograms, about 950 pounds. Meanwhile, the agency has identified more than 300 new designer drugs coming from abroad since 2010, which it says often get sold as molly containing MDMA.

The problem goes beyond deception; the chemical makeup of MDMA and of those other drugs is often similar, but the latter can be much more powerful, so taking an MDMA-size dose of one of these drugs can be lifethreatening. That's a risk dealers sometimes ignore when divvying up drugs and doses. Bromo-DragonFLY is a synthetic that is much stronger than Ecstasy, and taking an MDMA-size dose of it could be more than 1,000 times as potent as a typical Bromo-DragonFLY dose.

"This is a very dangerous hustle these dealers are playing," Neavyn says. "Just the slightest increase in one of these more potent analogues can mean the difference between a 'great high' and cardiac arrest."

In large doses, synthetics can cause paranoia, increased heart rate and even death, according to the National Institute on Drug Abuse. "In the most extreme cases, we see a problem that we haven't seen since the height of the crack cocaine epidemic," Hall says, referring to a condition known as excited delirium, which involves psychotic or violent behavior, kidney failure and an extreme increase in body temperature. "These are really guinea-pig drugs, and the population that's now taking what they think is MDMA is consuming literally poisons."

In other words, what college students think is the same substance Jay-Z and Miley Cyrus sing about could be the much-buzzed-about bath salts, a name that refers to a handful of "designer" drugs that made headlines in May 2012 after a man in Miami chewed off a homeless man's face and eye on the side of a causeway. Police at first said the man was likely on bath salts, though no traces showed up in toxicology reports. Other people believed to have been on bath salts have reportedly dragged their teeth across a police car hood, taken a lighter to a child's hands and wrists (allegedly to rid the body of demonic possession), eaten a pet dog, stabbed a goat to death, gone on a shooting spree and killed themselves.

Though consuming unaltered MDMA has risks—dehydration, increases in body temperature and heart rate—when taken in a safe environment and in an appropriate dosage, Wooldridge says, "it does have a lot of benefits for the user," such as reducing fear and increasing empathy. There is even a growing body of research on the potential for MDMA to treat post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). A 2012 paper published in the Journal of Psychopharmacology, for example, showed that for subjects suffering from

PTSD who had not found other treatments helpful, the "symptomatic relief provided by MDMA-assisted psychotherapy" lasted well after treatment.

In the Wesleyan case, police have arrested five students for their roles in allegedly supplying the substances and confiscated drugs from dorm rooms; they are awaiting lab test results to find out if those drugs actually contained MDMA. Though all of the Wesleyan patients are expected to survive, at least five college-age people have died since 2013 after taking what they thought was MDMA. In 2013, they included two people at the Electric Zoo music festival in New York City, one young woman at a Washington, D.C., nightclub and another at a music hall in Boston. In 2014, another young woman died, at the Austin City Limits Music Festival in Texas. Many more people have been hospitalized; in 2011, the year with the most recent data available, people under 21 made 10,176 MDMArelated emergency room visits, a 128 percent increase from 2005, according to the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration.

In the wake of the Wesleyan incident, advocates for safe drug policies have pointed out that many college kids just want to experiment safely. Wooldridge says that when DanceSafe provides on-site testing and people learn a substance isn't what they think it is, "the majority of the time we watch them throw that substance out or choose not to use it.... It kind of proves that young people do care about their health. They do care about what they consume."

DOWNTIME 2015.04.03



Thomas Rabsch/laif/Redux

T.C. BOYLE'S RETREAT INTO CALIFORNIA'S REDWOODS

BOYLE'S NEW NOVEL, "THE HARDER THEY COME," PLAYS OUT VIOLENTLY AMIDST THE THICK REDWOOD FORESTS OF FAR NORTHERN CALIFORNIA.

Before I really knew California, I thought the state ended more or less at the northern terminus of the Golden Gate Bridge: There were the Muir Woods, the Napa vineyards and then Oregon. But that's silly; there is much more land to go before the border, a vastness unimaginable to city slickers for whom three blocks is an adventure. Once, in the town of Weed, just south of the Oregon border, I walked into a public bathroom to find, reposing on the porcelain lip of the sink, a glass jar of, well, you know. The ample buds of sticky-icky sat there as innocently as a soap dish. I wasn't in San Francisco anymore.

T.C. Boyle's new novel, The Harder They Come, is set in this California well north of Frisco, a damp, forested land of burned-out hippies, desperadoes, back-to-the-landers, libertarians and people who were born around there and, caught in life's unpredictable eddies, never quite escaped. This is the California chugging along on a green economy, of sorts. "Weed," Boyle explains. "The great lure of the North Coast, the Gold Coast, Pot Alley. They grew grapes in the Anderson Valley, but they grew pot in the hills."

Among the region's natives is Sten Stensen, who served in Vietnam and later ascended to the "great and shining plateau of school principal" in "the sleepy lumber town of Fort Bragg." At the beginning of the novel, he is in a bus jouncing through Costa Rica, the rickety vehicle full of vacationers who are pallid and fanny-packed and "predead"—that is, retired. But Sten, at least, is not quite ready for the grave. The set piece that inaugurates The Harder They Come has the day-trippers ambushed by three robbers in a glade where they were supposed to begin a nature walk. Using his old close-combat skills, Sten kills one of the criminals with his bare hands, instantly becoming a hero among the middle-aged whites with whom he's been lazily sailing the Caribbean. The story follows him back home to Mendocino County, where it becomes big news.

The heroic glow does not last for long. It is darkened by the recrudescence of Adam, Sten's only child. His arrival signals the central conflict of the novel, the struggle between father and son, between the unthinking wildness of youth and the settled wisdom of age, between two visions of California, one a land for men of strength and conviction, the other a constellation of farmers' markets and carbon-neutral brew pubs.

Adam is one of the most vivid characters in recent American fiction, a perversion of every yuppie ideal of sound parenting, a nightmare from which his parents are unable to wake (Sten's wife, Carolee, never quite comes into focus). If you're at all familiar with Boyle's oeuvre, you know he loves little more than shredding the gossamer illusions behind which his characters—and his readers—hide. Adam is that serrated edge, tearing apart the bourgeois comforts in which his parents have long coddled themselves.

Once, Adam was "an inveterate doper who wore Burning Spear T-shirts and affected a Rasta accent." But then something in his brain came loose. He succumbed to paranoia, specifically an anti-Chinese sort alluding to the heinous "Yellow Peril" laws buried deep in California's historic subconscious. High on 'shrooms, he plowed his car into a playground, imagining that it was "some alien Chinese spacecraft just touched down and disgorging all these shrieking little half-sized hostiles who turned out to be kids, just kids." Later, he tried to make a "peace offering" at the Chinese embassy in San Francisco. That also went poorly.

And so Adam has retreated, into himself and into the depthless groves of the Redwood Empire. His fantasy is to live like a long-ago ancestor named John Colter, an utterly intrepid frontiersman and Lewis and Clark expedition member who collected beaver pelts and fought Indians and was afraid neither of killing nor being killed, though he'd rather avoid the latter if he could. A true American, in other words. Or as the novel's epigraph, courtesy of D.H. Lawrence, says, "The essential American soul is hard, isolate, stoic, and a killer. It has never yet melted."

If Adam were the reading kind (he isn't; nor is he much of a talker, his speech consisting mostly of grunts), he'd surely welcome that ferocious description of the national character. "Back to the Stone Age," Adam thinks. "More Colters. Live off the land. And get ready for the hostiles, because they were coming and they would just take what they wanted and nobody to stop them." Until the Chinese invasion, though, he is content to partake in the modern version of Colter's beaver pelt collecting: growing opium.

Adam's troubled soul is infused with some of the ugliest impulses in American society, including a fear of foreigners and a lust for violence. He is like a nascent Kurtz, deep in the heart of darkness, only without a single acolyte. He would be utterly unlikable if here were not so obviously ill; Adam's psychic vulnerability at least makes him sympathetic. So does the monstrous paradox of his desire to purge himself of society's bullshit, which only leads to bullshit of his own creation. Even his own name sounds, in his ears, derivative. "Adam was the original man," he laments, "and I'm not the original anything."

Adam finds shelter in the ample bosom of Sara Hovarty Jennings, a horse groomer who belongs to the Sovereign Citizen Movement and harbors deep-seated, deeply naive views about the "U.S. Illegitimate Government of America the Corporate," and in particular its manifestation in California, "the ultimate nanny state, everything you did short of drawing breath regulated through the roof, a list of no's half a mile long posted on every street corner." Her uncompromising, pedantic libertarian ethos (think Ron Paul as a high schooler tripping on Twizzlers) doesn't go over well with the cops, judges and other organs of authority of the aforementioned rapacious and purportedly illegal federal/state/municipal apparatus.

Spoiler alert: Shit gets real. And then it gets real bad. Adam is haunting the woods with his Norinco SKS Sporter assault rifle (ironically, made by a Chinese gunsmith), trying to get a nascent opium-growing operation to take root, so to speak. Meanwhile, there may be Mexicans growing weed in those same redwood groves. A group of xenophobic sylvan guardians, Sten among them, sets out in search of the purported Mexican grow. Sara has freed her dog, a yapping, dreadlocked pup named Kutya, from the local pound, where he was held because he lacked his rabies shot. She and Adam are both on the lam, though for different reasons. (Their romance is almost entirely physical and hence not entirely believable: Despite their shared anti-government impulses, they never connect on a plane above the carnal.)

True acolytes of Boyle's fiction will recall 1987's World's End, a dexterous exploration of the history of the Hudson River Valley that vacillated with remarkable fluidity between 17th-century Dutch country squires and their direct 20th-century descendants. It is one of the few historical novels I've read that is neither kitschy nor sunk by the weight of time. The Harder They Come (the 15th novel from Boyle, who has also published 10 short story collections) touches upon many similar themes, especially the Nietzschean notion of recurrent time, history always coming back to wallop the present. In both novels, Boyle is intrigued by the vestiges of the early American spirit and how it manifests today. A child of the 1960s (he graduated from college in 1968), he is also concerned with the long chill that followed the Summer of Love, the wane of that era's revolutionary impulses into the familiar corporatist spirit that may well be the covetous essence of the American soul.

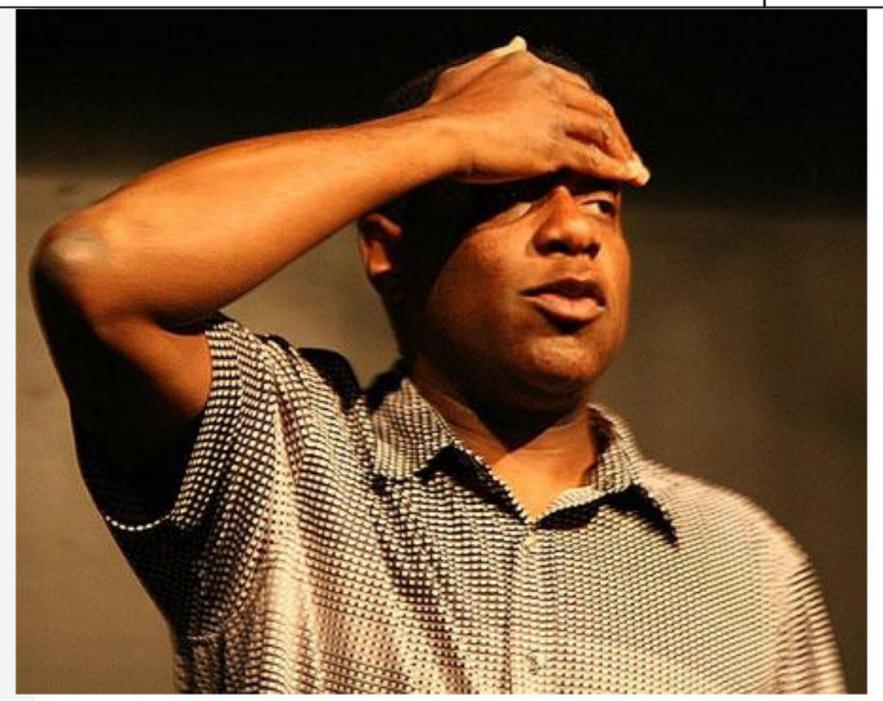
About a decade younger than Thomas Pynchon, Boyle is his less cerebral, less paranoid sibling, equally interested in the shortcomings of the American project, the shadowy valleys of the national spirit where a merely good novelist will not tread. Boyle, though, is the more readable of the two, more pleasurable on the page, less insular in his occupations. Pynchon has also set a book in far northern California: 1990's dreary Vineland, overrun by ninjas and

zombies. It is not a believable California, a funhouse whose mirrors are cracked.

Fifteen years ago, Boyle told The Paris Review that he was "writing novels of social engagement," noting some of the "cheerful" themes of the recent Tortilla Curtain and A Friend of the Earth: "the insoluble problems of environmental degradation, overpopulation, and the imminent collapse of the biosphere." These same concerns appear in The Harder They Come, along with those of generational misunderstanding, economic inequality and good old racism.

It is not a cheerful book. The best ones never are.

DOWNTIME 2015.04.03



briancopeland.com

AFTER ROBIN
WILLIAMS'S SUICIDE,
BRIAN COPELAND
REVIVES HIS SHOW
ABOUT DEPRESSION

COMEDIAN BRIAN COPELAND DECIDED NOT TO KILL HIMSELF AND MADE A ONE-MAN PLAY ABOUT THE EXPERIENCE; THEN THINGS GOT FUNNY.

"SUPERMAN KILLS SELF" ran the headline in June 1959, when George Reeves, star of TV's long-running Adventures of Superman was found dead of a single gunshot wound. Conspiracy theories have since argued that he was the victim of an accidental shooting, or it was murder (his girlfriend had mob connections), but for kids at the time the impact was devastating.

"It was national news," says stand-up comedian and radio host Brian Copeland. "One guy [in a documentary] said he went to school the next day and it was like the land of the zombies. Everyone was walking around just in shock."

Copeland was 10 when he found out, in 1974, about Reeves's demise. "They say he was a father to two generations; we all watched that show in reruns, and we couldn't believe he would do that." Copeland was a black child living in the predominantly white (99.4 percent according to the U.S. Census) Bay Area suburb of San Leandro, California. He coped by spending most of his time in his room, reading comic books. "When I was a kid, Superboy was my best friend," he recalls. "He was isolated, I was isolated; he was the only one of his kind, I was the only one of my kind."

That sort of thinking is common to most kids who identify with superheroes (If only you could see my magical powers!); it's also the way most people with depression feel, unique and invisible—whether they want to be or not.

Were it not for the national state of denial over Reeves's death, his suicide could have been a teachable moment, as they say, the beginning of a dialogue about depression and its toll. Copeland was one of those who refused to believe it, though now, at age 50, having attempted suicide and having written and performed a one-man show about his experience (The Waiting Period, at San Francisco's Marsh through April 19), the evidence seems overwhelming. "His blood alcohol was 2.0," says Copeland, "he'd had all these bad

breaks, he was coming up on a bad marriage, his career was going nowhere. And in that one moment, because that gun was there, he said, 'Fuck it.' That's exactly what happened."

Copeland was diagnosed with depression in 1999 though the 10 days dramatized in The Waiting Period occurred in 2008. (The title refers to the period of time one must wait in California to be able to buy a gun, the method of dispatch the comedian had chosen.) "Just a series of calamities," is what he recalls about his decision to kill himself. "My grandmother who raised me died suddenly; my wife took off; I got into a car accident that almost left me quadriplegic, I had to have surgery that left me in a neck brace, immobile, for three months; and I was just severely depressed."

He was also taking care of his three teenage children, from whom he tried to hide the depths of his despair. His daughter, Carolyn, is one of the more touching characters in the show, zeroing in on her father's telltale traits when he became too depressed to be a responsible parent (Chinese takeout turned out to be one warning sign). She had been one of his biggest boosters for her father's first one-man show, Not a Genuine Black Man, about Copeland's experiences growing up in San Leandro. (The longest running one-man show in Bay Area theater history went on to New York and has since been adapted as a book and TV pilot.) But like her siblings, she has only seen The Waiting Period once.

"All three kids came opening night and they would not come back," says Copeland about a show that prompts as many laughs as tears. "They knew what it was for, and about; they said, 'Dad, we lived it.""

The play had its genesis in the earlier work, in which the adult Copeland comes to terms with the casual racism he endured as a child (being stopped by white police for carrying a baseball bat or riding as a passenger in a white woman's car). "This stuff starts to come up and I don't understand why I'm breaking out crying for no reason," he says. "This ended up with me in a garage with the motor

running." Longtime San Francisco Chronicle theater critic Robert Hurwitt was among those who thought the depression angle was glossed over in Genuine, and Copeland began to contemplate giving the subject more attention in his follow-up piece. "My director and collaborator David Ford and I got together and talked about it a little bit," Copeland recalls. "Then I heard about the suicide of a 15-year-old kid—a kid I never met, [though] his cousin and aunt and uncle are very dear friends of mine.... One day he sent out five texts saying 'I love you' and then lay down on the railroad tracks. ... When I heard that I said, 'I'm gonna tell my story and maybe it will help some people.""

The Waiting Period opened in 2012 to rave reviews. "The show ran for a year and a half, and I had to stop it," says Copeland. "In order for me to convey to the audiences what it's really like to be in that place, I have to go there on stage, and after a year and a half I couldn't do it. It started to suck me back in." He performed the play at colleges and spoke at high schools (one of The Waiting Period's most poignant moments comes when a peppy girl at an affluent high school—"like Kelly Ripa on steroids"—outs herself as a fellow sufferer after hearing him speak) while developing other projects and continuing with his myriad day jobs. (Copeland is a recognizable figure in local media, having hosted the local Fox and ABC affiliates' TV talk shows, as well as his own radio program on KGO radio.)

"What really made me decide to bring it back was Robin Williams," Copeland says of the comic who committed suicide in August 2014. "I knew Robin; we were not great friends, but coming up in comedy in the Bay Area you had to know Robin. Last time I saw him he asked if I had DVDs of The Waiting Period and Genuine; he'd never seen either show. I have low-quality DVDs of both, archival things, so I sent them to him. I don't know to this day if he ever saw them."

Today Copeland dedicates his performances to different victims of suicide; the night I attended the program contained a picture of Matthew Potthast (February 2, 1996-January 20, 2015), who shot himself while his mother was in the other room. In the photo his mother provided he is wearing a tuxedo and smiling, no sign of despair behind his glasses.

"I did a couple of the Out of the Darkness Walks," says Copeland, referring to the marches to raise awareness about depression (which he calls "the scarlet D, our last stigmatized disease"). "I was an honorary chair two years ago; there were people carrying pictures of their loved ones and I was amazed at how many pictures of 19-year-old boys there were. There's something about boys 18, 19, 20 years old—college age. And whenever I perform this show at colleges the organizers will tell me they had several students come up to them in tears afterwards," saying they suffered from depression.

What is it about comedians and depression, I ask him. "Most comedians are the most unhappy people you'll ever meet," he says. "With the exception of Jack Benny, one of my comedy idols and Jay Leno; they were the only two comics I ever heard of who had happy well-adjusted childhoods.... For most real comics the happiest time of their day is that 20 minutes that they're up on stage."

Copeland began performing when he was 18. He got the bug to make people laugh when he performed in plays in high school and soon was hitting San Francisco's comedy clubs, using his fake ID to see performers like Williams, Dana Carvey and Bob Goldthwait, all part of the vibrant scene there then. Like many comics his age, seeing the first Richard Pryor performance film was a revelation. "I'd never seen comedy that real," he recalls. "He talked about shooting the tires out of his car; it's considered the most brilliant 90 minutes of standup ever filmed. That made me think I want to try this."

A former high school coach, Tommy Thomas, had just opened his own comedy club, Tommy T's down the street. "I called and said, 'I wonder if you have an open mike night?" and he said, 'No, but I have a comic sick tonight. Can you do 15 minutes?' This if 5 o'clock, the show was at 9. But I'm 18 so I go, 'Sure!' I opened the paper and wrote 15 minutes of jokes; all I remember is that the Falkland War was going on and I wrote jokes about that. And there were 12 people in the audience but I went on and they laughed and I felt this rush."

As most addicts learn, those moments between the rushes can be quite painful. Copeland's education has included coming to terms with his need for attention but also the legacy of depression in his family. "I lost my mother when I was 14; she was 36—sarcoidosis, the same thing Bernie Mac died from. I realize now she was depressed... she would go in her room—it was my mother and my grandmother and me and my four little sisters—and she would go in her room on Friday and we wouldn't see her until Sunday. Grandma would give us plates to take up to her and knock on the door and give her a plate and then come back later and take the empty plate. ... Then she would come out and everything would be fine."

At the end of each performance, Copeland exhorts his audience to talk about what they are feeling, or not feeling, and for parents, spouses and even children to be on the lookout for the warning signs of depression themselves. "If you know what the signs are—your brother loves going to the racetrack and he never goes anymore—you have to try and reach out." He has been gratified by the response, both from people who have come to him afterward and even an Iraq war vet who credited Copeland's show with waking him up to his PTSD.

"You should be no more ashamed of depression than you should if you had Lou Gehrig's disease or cancer," says Copeland. "As I say at the end, 'If I can stand up here

for 70 minutes and spill my guts to strangers, you can tell somebody that you are having thoughts that are not in your best interest."

DOWNTIME 2015.04.03



Cultura/Twinpix/Getty

YOU'RE 100% WRONG ABOUT: PRIVACY

BREAK YOUR GADGETS IF YOU WANT TO KEEP FACEBOOK, TWITTER AND GOOGLE FROM HANDING OVER YOUR INFORMATION.

Want to keep Facebook, Twitter and Google from selling your information to advertisers and handing it over to the good folks in Langley? Take a hammer and bring it down hard on the screen of your smartphone. Then do the same to your tablet, laptop and office desktop.

Now exhale. You're safe.

The word privacy is not in the Constitution, though several amendments and Supreme Court decisions mandate the government to stay out of your personal business unless it has unimpeachable reasons for intrusion. But as the Edward Snowden leaks demonstrated, the feds do covertly collect data about us, often with the complicity of high-tech and telecom corporations.

So what? Why is privacy good? Why is it so important to keep people from knowing what we are doing? We may want to hide certain activities, but do we actually need to? I can't think of a single defensible reason for placing privacy above other values, like honesty and civility.

True, a complete lack of privacy would be harmful. This I say with confidence, having been raised in the Soviet Union, a Panopticon society in which anyone could reasonably expect, at any time, that he/she was being watched. But is the opposite any better?

As the influential jurist Richard A. Posner argued in the wake of the Boston Marathon bombing, privacy is "really just a euphemism for concealment." Most of us conceal actions that, while neither immoral nor illegal, we are unwilling to own up to. I want neither the National Security Agency nor the person in the next cubicle to know that I just watched Taylor Swift's "Shake It Off" video for the 17th time in a row. Were, however, my privacy to be compromised, no serious harm would ensue.

Sometimes, such violations are necessary, because digital privacy is being used to hide the illegal behavior of terrorists, pedophiles or drug dealers. Invading privacy to maintain the public welfare is the government holding up its end of the social contract, ensuring that the privacy of a few is not allowed to compromise the life and liberty of many.

Privacy's handmaiden, anonymity, can be used for relatively harmless activities: visiting Pornhub, for example, or posting a nasty comment to a news story about Scott Walker without having to reveal that you are head of

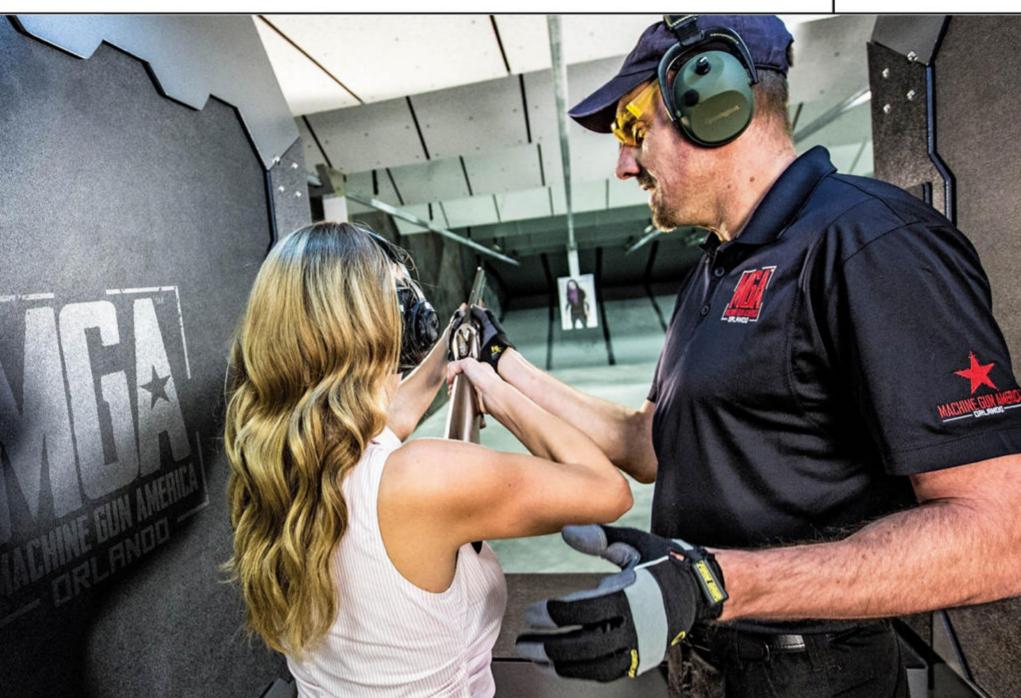
the Palookaville GOP. But some kinds of anonymity are harmful. Let's say a female academic is harassed by Twitter trolls who threaten to rape and kill her (remember Gamergate?): Twitter may have no legal obligation to reveal the trolls' identities, but doesn't it have a moral one?

Sometimes the balance between privacy and openness is going to lurch too far in some direction. However, it seems impossible to have an open society in which everyone is always wearing masks, in which our actions carry no consequences.

There is, finally, the issue of implied consent. When you get into a car, you're aware that a police officer with a radar gun might clock you going above the speed limit. Similarly, any user of Google has to expect that his/her information will be used for commercial gain. After all, Facebook's \$200 billion valuation isn't a tribute to its egalitarian spirit. You enter a contract and pay your end.

None of this is to say that the expectation of privacy is misguided. But when privacy and anonymity are used to evade responsibility, the Internet curdles from a libertarian dream into an anarchic nightmare. Some privacy is crucial. Total privacy is a dangerous delusion.

DOWNTIME 2015.04.03



Machine Gun America

MACHINE GUN AMERICA IS EXACTLY WHAT IT SOUNDS LIKE

JUST SEVEN MILES FROM THE MAGIC KINGDOM, YOU CAN PLAY REAL SHOOT-'EM-UP GAMES.

Machine Gun America (MGA) is the corner anchor of a strip mall in central Florida, near a flea market that targets Disney World tourists ("Visitors Flea Market") and Old Town, an amusement park that boasts of a ride called the Vomatron. Before Orlando's "first and only Automatic

Adrenaline Attraction" opened in that space, it was occupied by an all-you-can-eat steak and seafood buffet whose 1.5-star Yelp rating made it one of the less attractive attractions on U.S. Highway 192.

The route is classic Americana, a mix of roadside kitsch and chain restaurants like Chili's, punctuated with discount ticket stands and the occasional helipad. This stretch is home to "the world's largest orange," a giant, dome-shaped citrus store formally named Eli's Orange World. Nearby sits a wizard-shaped gift shop named Magic Castle Gift Kingdom. Go a little farther and you'll hit Medieval Times's brick turrets. The Magic Kingdom itself is a mere seven miles away.

MGA has received some bad press since opening in December, just four months after a 9-year-old in Nevada killed her shooting instructor with an Uzi. "What could possibly go wrong?" snarked a 2014 Daily Mail headline. "Assault rifle theme park 'Machine Gun America' where children as young as 13 fire military-grade weapons in zombie-themed training simulators to open in Orlando." A Miami Herald op-ed chided: "What kind of society romanticizes killing?... What message are we passing on to our teenagers when we equate gunplay and violence with a spin in the Gravitron?" The Orlando Sentinel's Beth Kassab said, "Something doesn't seem right about pulling over on U.S. Highway 192—across from the carnival games and bumper cars of Old Town and next to a Denny's—plunking down some cash and picking up an automatic weapon without any real training."

On the sunny February afternoon that I visit MGA, a gaggle of staffers greets prospective shooters at the door. The interior is clean and spacious, the color scheme is neutral, save for bright red chairs and a cobalt accent wall. With package prices that range from \$99 to \$399, MGA's visitors can shoot everything from a Cimarron Revolver to the Rambo-esque RPD belt-fed machine gun. Kids as

young as 13 can participate, as long as they have a guardian present. A politely enthusiastic salesman approaches and asks, without an inkling of irony, which experience I want. MGA is big on experiences. There's a zombie-themed "Walking Dread" package, which includes an AK-47 and Raging Bull Revolver. There's "Big Screen Legends," which features Scarface's M16 and Dirty Harry's .44 Magnum; and "Automatic Divas," which comes with a submachine gun, a machine gun and a semiautomatic pistol, and promises to "unleash your inner femme fatale."

I go for the \$189 "Special Ops" experience. A major addition to my shooting résumé (which to date mostly consists of BB guns and .22 rifles at Jewish summer camp), Special Ops includes rounds with a Glock 17, a Mossberg shotgun, and an M4 and MP5 machine gun. Wes Doss, MGA's director of safety and training, later tells me that it's one of the range's most popular packages. "I think a lot of that's driven by the really popular online games," he says.

The experience comes with two targets. They're out of the traditional black that day, so a salesman gives me pink "Shoot for a Cure" targets intended to raise breast cancer awareness (as only firing bullets at a chest really can?) Other options for my target include an Osama bin Laden, a Jason Statham look-alike with nipple rings and a T-shirt target whose white lettering reads, "I Shot at Machine Gun America" over a red bull's-eye.

Doss says the T-shirt is probably one of the most popular targets. "You can shoot up the shirt and wear it, and, depending on what a good shot you are, you either have shot a complete hole in the front or you can just frame it for your office."

A short credit card preauthorization and liability waiver later, a staffer hands me a pair of protective earmuffs and safety glasses. The range safety officer then leads me into the shooting gallery, which looks a lot like the practice ranges one sees in police movies. According to Doss, the attraction is popular with families, conventioneers and law enforcement agents, as well as couples on dates. On this particular afternoon, it was quiet. Doss says adults make up almost all of MGA's patrons; percentage-wise, he quantifies it in the "high 90s."

My experience kicks off with a Glock 17, and the officer assigned to me explains how to hold it with both hands. My right, the trigger hand, goes around the pistol first; the left goes on the other side of the gun so that my fingers are slightly overlapping. I line up the front and back sights, per his instructions. Then I pull the trigger. The gun fires with a pop, and a small hole appears in my target's chest. Twenty rounds later, I've finished my first semiautomatic magazines. Throughout, my assigned safety officer is never more than six inches away from me.

Next up is the Mossberg. I position the butt of the gun near my armpit, do some pumping and ka-pow! The recoil smarts against my chest and, despite the earmuffs, the shot is loud. I take one more shot and then beg off: I need to retain some hearing for the machine guns.

"One of the most widely used submachine guns in the world," according to the MGA, the MP5 is also what the theme park calls "a staple in the Special Operations community." The M4, a similar gun, is used frequently by U.S. Army soldiers. The machine guns have less recoil than the Mossberg but aren't more pleasant to shoot. They spit bullets so quickly that I can't help closing my eyes for a split second while firing. As always, my instructor sticks close by. I switch to the Statham target for the M4. I don't hit either of his nipple rings.

Post-experience, I wonder if people are needlessly freaking out over a tourist trap, or are they right to worry about the trivialization of guns? Shooting at MGA was sometimes uncomfortable, yes, but also positive, enlightening even. I write often about violence, much of it gun-related. Learning about firearms firsthand seems

not only appropriate but necessary. "It's natural for people to have an aversion to different types of businesses being in different types of communities," Doss says of MGA's haters. Meanwhile, he adds, "some of the businesses that they aren't concerned about—the liquor stores, some of the adult businesses—I find a whole lot more disturbing than a gun range."

BIG SHOTS



UP AGAINST THE OLD WALL

Jerusalem - Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu speaks to the media in front of the Western Wall, Judaism's holiest prayer site on March 18. Netanyahu won a surprise victory in Israel's election to claim a fourth term after a hard tack to the right in the final days of campaigning that included the release of a video warning that Arab Israelis were planning to bus in voters to polling stations and a commitment that there would be no Palestinian state as long as he was in charge. The day after the election, Netanyahu backtracked, saying he was open to a two-state solution, but that the timing was not right at the present moment.



Ronen Zvulun/Reuters

BIG SHOTS



A PRAYER FOR THE DYING

Sanaa, Yemen - A man carries the body of a child out of a mosque after suicide bombers targeted the Shiite Muslim congregation on March 20. In a coordinated attack, four bombers wearing explosive belts hit two crowded mosques during noon prayers, killing at least 137 people and wounding around 350 others. ISIS claimed responsibility and promised more attacks in Yemen. A day later the U.S. military decided to pull the remainder of its troops out of the rapidly fragmenting nation where Shiite Houthi militias have taken over the capital.



Khaled Abdullah/Reuters



WITH OR WITHOUT HONOR

Sevastopol, Crimea - Crimean honor guards prepare for a celebration of the first anniversary of the signing of the decree on the annexation of that region by Russia, on March 18. Crimea was taken by Russia in 2014 following a referendum that has been condemned by Western nations as a breach of international law and a subterfuge to give Russia control of this strategic naval port city.



Alexander Aksakov/Getty

BIG SHOTS

2015.04.03



BREAKING BOKO HARAM

Damask, Nigeria - Chadian soldiers leave the battlefield by helicopter after fighting Boko Haram militants on March 18. The militant group, which controlled this town near the southern border of Niger for months, was ousted by a joint operation involving troops from Chad and Niger. At least 70 bodies, with their throats slit or decapitated were found dumped on the outskirts of town, their identities unknown. Nigeria's President Goodluck Jonathan told the BBC he hoped to recover all the territory ruled by Boko Haram within a month. "They are getting weaker and weaker by the day," he said.



Jerome Delay/AP